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Political Economy of Rural Female Labour: A Study of Labour Relations in East Uttar Pradesh (UP), India

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Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD in Development Studies

September 2012

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Declaration for PhD thesis

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Abstract

This thesis studies labour relations and struggles of rural dalit women belonging to the category of classes of labour. To this end, this research undertook a gender and caste-based mapping of dominant village-based socio-economic relations. Situated within agrarian political economy, this thesis understands rural labour in terms of Bernstein's 'classes of labour'. This thesis has shown that rural female labour is agrarian. Dalit female labourers are concentrated in the least paying and low status tasks that often feature unfree labour relations. It argues that with male outmigration, women have been pushed into unfree labour relations, which may even be willingly chosen, because they operate as insurance cum safety net. Patron-client relations are still associated with many benefits and at the same time they function to keep labourers divided and facilitate capitalist domination. Labour relations are a part of wider village-based social, economic and political relations of dominance and subjugation and are shaped by class, caste and gender identities. I argue that caste, with an overlapping class consciousness, is the predominant frame of association with politics and the basis of labour struggles. Labour struggles mostly take the form of 'weapons of the weak' (Scott 1985, 1986) and 'negotiations' (Jeffery & Jeffery, 1996) within existing power structures. They can occur within unfree labour relations and patron-client relations. The outcomes of these labour struggles are important to the extent that female labourers have managed to extract limited economic gains and that these struggles symbolise their politicisation and assertion. At certain conjunctural moments, events combine with existing socio-economic ground conditions, leading to the creation of a collective consciousness. This consciousness takes on a more aggressive expression, driven by extreme economic deprivation, albeit within the frame of caste. Such labour struggles equally engage male and female labour.

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List of abbreviations

UP: Uttar Pradesh

GOI: Government of Uttar Pradesh

SC: Scheduled Castes

ST: Scheduled Tribes

OBC: Other Backward Classes

M.Phil: Master of Philosophy

MGNREGA: Mahatama Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act

GoUP: Government of Uttar Pradesh

NCEUS: National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganized Sector

GDP: Gross Domestic Product

RBI: Reserve Bank of India

INC: Indian National Congress

PDS: Public Distribution System

IAY: Indira Awaas Yojna

SHG: Self-help Group

BPL: Below Poverty Line

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The main objective of this thesis is to study rural dalit female labour relations. It also explores the struggles of these rural dalit female labourers against their oppressors.

My interest in this research area is partly a natural progression of my M.Phil. study on the impact of globalisation on female labour in agriculture and industry in India. How have neoliberal capitalist developments impacted agriculture, rural social classes and specifically the rural labourers? Is rural and agricultural labour one and the same? Who is a labourer today? How have labourers responded to this restructuring? What role do social structures like gender and caste play? Such questions continued to intrigue me. These are important questions, given that India is a young and labour abundant country where the majority of the population continues to be rural and some how dependent on the agricultural sector which has witnessed profound changes since the early 1990s.

However, these issues were not a focus in my postgraduate studies, at a premier Indian university. Many courses offered then tended to focus on theoretical issues, cultural identities and conventional literature. Indeed, these are very important elements in a student's training. But one cannot study philosophy and theory, without empirical application and validation. More so, if one is interested in dynamic areas that would require fieldwork. While the importance of cultural identities in Indian history and polity cannot be denied, this should not undermine interrogation of phenomenon and relations from other equally important variables and how these may intersect. Finally, knowledge of seminal literature is important as the first step, but this should be subjected to recent and emerging evidence and new perspectives.

Apart from my personal interests and reasons, there are other reasons why research on rural dalit female labour relations is interesting and important. Labour studies in the Indian context have broadly focussed on the role of the state and the informal economy. Within agriculture, the emphasis has been on the implications of reduced

state support and trade liberalisation vis-à-vis disparately defined farmers. In most empirical studies, female labour is implicit. It is not directly studied, but referred in relation to what is happening to male labour. This is ironical given the disproportionate concentration of female labourers in agriculture. It denies the importance of women as independent economic actors, more so in a context of labour fragmentation and mobility, and as the primary everyday providers of household sustainability. Implicit in this indirect and under representation of female labourers, is the tendency to assume that men and women confront capitalist forces in a similar manner, that they are incorporated within capitalist social relations similarly and that their experience of capitalist exploitation is undifferentiated. More importantly, the lack of nuanced investigation is problematic for it reifies existing unequal power relations. It is only when female labour is directly studied can these questions and other generalisations be substantively interrogated, such that policy provisions can take into account ground realities.

The above also indicate the significance of this research, derived from its focus on one of the most socially and economically discriminated and marginalised population and from their absence in the literature despite the importance of social segregation in rural India on the basis of gender, caste and class.

The few studies dealing with rural female labour relations are concerned with quite specific regions of India i.e. either South India or selected green revolution areas. But most of rural labour lives in less developed areas of north, central and eastern India. One such area is eastern UP. The north Indian state of UP is characterised by regionally unequal levels of development. However, with the exception of certain case studies, most work on UP centres on the more developed western part of the state. Eastern UP is a much under researched area, despite being one of the most backward areas in the country and state. The state of UP was also thought to make an interesting case study given the regional political context of a government that came to power on a platform of dalit votes. Presently no substantive contribution to this topic based on empirical work in east UP exists. It being my home state and a familiarity with language and the society also influenced the choice of UP.

The study should be understood on the background of the agrarian transformations under the advance of neoliberal capitalist globalisation, as this has major implications for rural classes. An understanding of these developments is essential because agriculture is the preferred entry point to study rural labour. One reason for this is that female labour is posited as agrarian, as mentioned above. Another is that changes in agrarian production structure and social relations are encompassed within its political economy. This is key in understanding such historical transformations. It is widely acknowledged that these agrarian transformations have had a varied impact on rural classes and these processes of differentiation are further refracted through gender, caste and other such categories.

A political economy approach uses a class analysis to investigate relations of power, of domination and exploitation and how the political nature of public policy brings into effect an institutional infrastructure and economic policy which has differential consequences for the position of various classes. It is believed that such an approach focussing on processes and relations would enable a comprehensive understanding of how, in neoliberal globalisation, capitalist social relations are premised on labour exploitation and organized to secure capitalist accumulation. Therefore, a political economy analysis of agrarian change and rural labour was chosen.

Central to agrarian political economy have been theoretical debates on the various paths of agrarian transition. This thesis is not concerned with these or their relevance per se, but rather with how the classical agrarian question is interpreted in the present context and what this has meant for rural social classes. There are various views on this. Here it will be argued that Henry Bernstein's approach is the best point of departure. To this extent and purpose, Bernstein's framework is used as the theoretical reference point for this thesis: his reinterpretation of the classical agrarian question as an agrarian question of capital and labour; how these are reformulated in the evolving dynamics of neoliberal capitalism; his contributions on how this reconfigures the conditions of existence and reproduction of the classes of capital and labour; and finally, his derivation of 'classes of labour'.

A systematic empirical application of Bernstein's theorisation on rural class structure in an Indian context is still relatively new. As such, in the second chapter of this

thesis, a broad review of literature on neoliberal agricultural developments and its effects on marginal/small farmers is used to draw some stylised facts about these and highlight the tendencies and nature of differentiation today. This is done at a general macro level. Following this, Bernstein's position is detailed. In making the case for this theoretical framework, the chapter undertakes a critical survey of alternative theorisations on the classical agrarian question. This is followed by discussing Bernstein in relation to other schemas on rural class structure proposed on the basis of field studies in the Indian context.

Additionally, the theoretical discussion in the second chapter highlights the importance of non-class variables like gender and caste in analysing agrarian social relations. At a general level, a gendered analysis of the agrarian question is looked at through Bridget O'Laughlin's approach and it is explained why a gendered approach was not selected for this research. What is meant by caste how it intersects with gender in the Indian context is flagged.

To reiterate, this thesis is not about caste and gender per se. It is about the labour relations of dalit women belonging to the classes of labour category. While approaching the study from a class based perspective, the focus is on gender and caste aspects. A fieldwork approach was chosen. The fieldwork focussed on specific aspects of dalit female labour relations. It also looked into the wider social relations of which labour relations are a part. The forms taken by female labour struggles were also investigated. To study labour relations, one has to first have knowledge of the main forms of labour commodification. In the case of UP, this information was not available. Therefore, the obvious starting point for the fieldwork was a gender and caste based occupational mapping of the field villages. As such, the mapping exercise is an essential means to study labour relations and also an important finding of this thesis.

The third chapter locates the key elements of the neoliberal phase in Indian agriculture. It provides a brief sketch of agricultural growth and development post 1990s, highlighting the case of UP. Drawing on evidence from various studies implications for marginal/small farmers are indicated. In so doing, gender and caste concerns are of particular concern. This provides an overview of the various

economic and social developments against which to understand rural labour generally and identification of dominant themes in rural labour relations. Delineating aspects of labour relations generally and dalit female labour relations specifically, highlighted emerging areas of investigation and provided interesting and important pointers for my fieldwork. The fourth chapter breaks down these areas of enquiring into specific questions and deals with the methodological design and implementation for fieldwork.

In presenting the findings from the three studied villages, the fifth and sixth chapters represent the empirical contribution of this thesis on the topic. These chapters provide a socio-economic snapshot of the villages by discussing their spatial organisation, landownership structure and mapping occupational patterns of the various castes. Drawing on these, it is established who the classes of labour are and what are the main forms of labour commodification. Following this, dalit female labour relations are described. Aspects such as wage relations, recruitment process, labour control mechanisms, evidence on unfree labour and intra-labour relations are examined. Forms of protest and resistance by dalit female labour and how they relate to local political issues are also analysed. These villages show significant similarity across these areas. This thesis does not claim to be a work on Indian agriculture per se.

The main conclusions that emerge from the field findings confirm and/or provide new insights into agrarian changes and implications for rural labour as laid out in the second and third chapters. These insights provide nuances on the basis of class, caste and gender. For example, while it is true that labour moves across various location in search of productive employment, contrary to popular assumptions this might not be the case for landless labourers. Reliance on agriculture for the reproduction of capital and labour, diversification of employment, delocalisation of income sources, practice of occupational multiplicity etc. also need to be qualified along class, caste and gender lines in view of field evidence. Given that no substantive study on dalit female labour relations in eastern UP exists, establishing these is a major contribution of this thesis, as is documenting and analysing evidence on their forms of resistance. The evidence presented also subjects established facts about labour relations to the possibility of new critical enquiry. For example, this research will show evidence contrary to Breman's assertion that patron-client relations are no longer associated

with beneficial aspects or that neo-bondage is based merely on economic arrangements. The concluding chapter brings together the main findings of all chapters in illustrating the contribution of this thesis on rural female labour relations.

The essence of this thesis lies in a conceptualisation of gendered agrarian relations, intercepted by caste and class. The emphasis has been on labour rather than capital.

Chapter 2

Neoliberal Agricultural Development, Agrarian Question and Rural Labour

This chapter sets out the objectives of this thesis and outlines the theoretical and conceptual framework on which it is based.

This thesis is a study of rural female labour relations. As a first step to this, it maps forms of labour commodification, self-employment activities and other activities not monetarily remunerated. Nonetheless, these are of value and contribute to household reproduction. This mapping is a finding in itself and also necessary for locating labour relations of rural labouring households. The other concern of this thesis has to do with forms taken by rural labour struggles. These objectives were investigated in three villages in Kushinagar district of eastern Uttar Pradesh in India, with specific reference to dalit female labour.¹

The framework in which this study is located is that of agrarian political economy. Within this framework, the approach of agrarian questions is used to focus on rural labour. From this perspective it is argued that Henry Bernstein's development of the classical agrarian question and his conceptualisation of rural labour in the contemporary context is, best suited to this study. As such, Bernstein's rural class differentiation is taken as the theoretical entry point to approaching and interpreting rural labour in the context of neoliberal globalisation and related developments in agriculture.

This chapter is organised in the following manner. The first section provides a brief description of the changed contours of agricultural development under neoliberal capitalist globalisation and their consequences for the rural labouring classes in developing countries. This is important because, though subject to much debate, rural labour continues to be either perceived as predominantly agrarian or at least

¹ Dalit is a socio-political conceptual invention, literally meaning down-trodden. It was first used by Phule with reference to the (ex) untouchables. The term dalit is commonly used to refer to scheduled castes, the ex-untouchables (see pg.53).

originating from the village agricultural economy. In much of the literature such labour is treated as a fuzzy category to which certain general characteristics are attributed on the basis of observed empirical tendencies. Following this, the concern of the second section is to understand rural class differentiation today. To this end, the classic agrarian political economy perspective on class differentiation and Bernstein's development of it is discussed. The third section discusses few alternative interpretations of the classical agrarian question in contemporary times. How do these interpretations understand labour vis-à-vis Bernstein is the main focus. The fourth section does the same in the Indian context. The fifth section is on labour struggles and rural political expression i.e. the various ways in which class interests have been expressed and labourers have tried to improve their position.

2.1. The Context: Neoliberal Agricultural Development and Rural Labour

In order to define the category of rural labour for purposes of this study, it is essential to have a basic knowledge of neoliberal agrarian restructuring and its implications for marginal and small farmers. These are summarised in this section.

The application of neoliberal policies to several countries of developing South has to be located in the crisis of the state led development model, the oil crisis of the 1970s and the external debt crisis of 1980s and 1990s. Introduced as aid conditionality, these policies were a part of IMF-World Bank designed structural adjustment and economic reform programmes. The timing, pace and extent of the structural adjustment programme varied from country to country and was marked by the internal characteristics of each country and region.

Broadly, these policies ended the era of government food and input subsidies, privatised or eliminated various extension services such as technical support and institutions such as the state agricultural marketing boards and reversed the collectivisation of land, such as in several Latin American countries. Controls relating to policies of pricing, import quotas and tariffs and exports were dismantled. Such reversals were accompanied by policies such as devaluation and trade liberalisation (Gibbon, 1992; Kay, 2001; Raikes, 2001; Oya, 2007; Chandrasekhar and Ghosh, 2002).

The theoretical foundation of the neoliberal policy logic is found in the neoclassical economic theory. In this perspective, the state is corrupt, inefficient and creates distortions. The market is non-hierarchical, neutral and composed of free and rational individuals seeking to maximise utility and benefit through market based exchanges. Therefore, the state should concern itself with creating conditions to promote unfettered functioning of markets. For example, political stability, secure property rights and minimal transactions costs and informational asymmetries. The spread of the market would lead to economic growth and development (Saad-Filho, 2005; Oya, 2007).

This paradigm shift effected a change in the fundamental role of the agricultural sector in concerned developing economies. Earlier agriculture's role was that of sourcing labour and financing industrialisation (for example, Saith, 1990). This state led development model tackled agricultural modernisation and social inequalities in a bid to create a more productive agriculture (Bernstein, 2010). But at the same time, these policies accentuated regional imbalances and class based contradictions (Cleaver, 1972). Under neoliberalism, agriculture is seen as an important driver of economic growth, poverty reduction and food security in the developing South, excluding the more industrialised East Asian countries (World Bank, 2008). These policies have not been clear successes and their impact has been much debated. Even in the limited cases of success, the causes of growth have been difficult to ascertain or specifically attribute to the market reforms (for example see, Rodrik, 2004; Khan, 2007, Bardhan, 2010).

What did this changed structural context then mean for small farmers and agricultural labourers who are the subject of this study? The following is an indicative summary of widely observed and accepted generalisations on the changed contours of neoliberal agriculture and their implications for small farmers and labourers.

According to Bernstein (2001, 2006b, 2007, 2010), an important impact is the domination of agriculture by global agri-business corporations in areas of agricultural production, farming techniques, organizational techniques, processing, marketing and even in shaping in demand patterns. Common to agrarian neoliberalism is capital

concentration and labour fragmentation. These processes have differentially impacted agriculture and rural classes and the effects are particularly acute for small farmers who numerically dominate agriculture in developing countries (Bernstein, 2010). Non-class identities and factors also mediate the impact (Harriss-White and Heyer, 2010), for example, gender, caste, culture and religion and the political structure.

Both domestic production and export agriculture suffered set-backs because of lack of access to inputs, supporting services and other facilities at a time of rising production and living costs. In export sector, inability of small farmers to compete with cheaper imports or even in high end domestic urban markets; to cope with market risks and price fluctuations; their inability to establish secure linkages with high value global commodity chains; and their dependency on foreign capital in the case of contract farmers were further handicaps. Various studies (Gibbon, 1992; Bryceson & Jamal, 1997; Bryceson, et al., 2000) attest to this in the context of different regions.

Overall uncertainty and declining returns from agriculture resulted in greater vulnerability and indebtedness of small farmers. This was manifest in mortgage or sale of land to meet production costs, produce linked to advance for inputs, distress sales and even suicides of farmers in extreme cases. The situation may be exacerbated by country level factors such as small landholding size, limited domestic market and limited alternative employment and income sources. There have been negative consequences for equity as well. Marginalised populations such as women headed households, widows or lower castes that have been unable to take advantage of new opportunities in the face of poor asset and resource base, are pushed into certain types of wage labour or repressed under the combination of economic distress and religious practices as described by Meagher & Mustapha (1997). These adverse effects find mention in several studies (Bryceson & Jamal, 1997; Ministry of Finance, Government of India, 2007; Ramchandran, et al., 2010; Reddy & Mishra, 2010).

With declining dependence on agriculture for reproduction, small farmers were pushed into seeking alternative productive employment opportunities to cope with seasonal agricultural labour demand. Occupational multiplicity associated diversification into non-agricultural and self-employment activities involved delocalisation of income sources and increase in labour mobility (Bryceson & Jamal,

1997; Bryceson, et al., 2000; NCEUS, 2007). This process, referred to as deagrarianisation, took different forms depending upon class and social position and has a gender and generational angle (Bryceson, 1996; Rigg, 2006). Deagrarianisation may or may not be accompanied with depeasantisation i.e. the process by which peasants/subsistence oriented farmers lose access to the means to reproduce themselves (Bryceson, 2000). A broad network of social relations and patron-client relations were also cultivated to improve access to resources and provide security in lean times.

In view of these dynamic processes, how is rural labour best understood? It is not just rural or agricultural labour, but as pointed out by Lerche (2010) and Bernstein (2010), it is rather labour in constant movement across diverse locations attempting to secure individual and household reproduction. Central to a political economy analysis of agrarian change is an understanding of rural class differentiation and the features of these classes. The next section is concerned with this.

2.2. The Agrarian Question and the Reconceptualisation of Rural/Agrarian Labour as ‘Classes of Labour’

Agriculture has continued to be the preferred entry point for most studies on rural labour despite the changes in the balance of forces affecting agriculture and rural social formations. Here, the approach of agrarian question is used to gain an insight into the rural change and class structure. This section briefly engages with the classical political economy perspective on the agrarian question and the nature of class differentiation, before moving on to Bernstein’s development of it in contemporary context.

Byres (1977, 1996; Bernstein, 1996) deconstructed the classical agrarian question into three meanings. Drawing on Engel’s work, the first meaning has to do political alliances between a growing industrial working class and peasantry to bring about structural transformations in the context of capitalist development. The second meaning was derived from the works of Kautsky and Lenin. It refers to the form and extent of capitalist development in agriculture and obstacles to such development. Here, Lenin considered whether capitalist development could occur in conditions of

economic backwardness and he argued that this was indeed happening in Russia. The third meaning of the agrarian question was derived from Preobrazhensky's work and referred to the generation of an agrarian surplus to finance industrialisation and the creation of a domestic market.

Debates on the classical agrarian question have centred on the transition to capitalism, the continued relevance or not of the classical agrarian question and alternative interpretations of it in the context of neoliberal globalisation (Byres, 1996; Bernstein, 1996, 2006a, 2010; Lerche, 2008; Akram-Lodhi & Kay, 2009a, 2010a, 2010b). The concern here is not with agrarian transition or its relevance per se, but more with what this means for rural social classes in general and agricultural labour in particular, how this has been theoretically reformulated in the present context, and whether and what analytical tools it extends which lend themselves to works such as this thesis.

According to Bernstein (2010), the capitalist agrarian structure that emerged out of feudalism in England (fifteenth to eighteenth centuries) was based on 'capitalist landed property, agrarian capital and landless labour' (Bernstein, 2010, p. 28). Capitalist landed property referred to landowners with private property rights who could sell, rent or lease out land (now a commodity). Tenant farmers were representative of agrarian capital who rented land to produce for the market and make profit. The commodification of land resulting in the dispossession of peasants (subsistence-oriented farmers) created a class of landless labour working for the above classes or providing 'free' wage labour for industrialisation. The England case is seen as one of successful agrarian transition.

Byres (1996) reading of Lenin's analysis of the Prussian case (sixteenth to nineteenth centuries) indicates a successful resolution of the agrarian question but here capitalist farming was a gradual development and land relations retained semi-feudal features for a considerably longer time. Feudal landlords, who dominated the processes of capitalist transformation, became capitalist farmers. Differentiation of the peasantry was limited as only a minority of big peasants, in association with landlords, were transformed into capitalist farmers. Majority of the peasants became landless. Lenin described this type of capitalist agrarian transition as 'capitalism from above'. In contrast, Lenin described the American case (nineteenth century) as 'capitalism from

below'. In the absence of feudalism, capitalist relations in agriculture emerged from within the peasantry, mainly from rich peasants who were transformed into a capitalist class. At the other extreme, the poor peasants were transformed into agricultural or urban wage labourers. This case reflected greater social differentiation among the peasantry reconfigured as petty commodity producers under spreading commodity relations.

According to Akram-Lodhi & Kay (2010), in the context of capitalist agricultural development in Europe, Lenin described the emerging rural class structure as such. At the top were big landowners who did not engage in manual labour but hired wage labour and small peasants directly or through tenants. Then came the big peasants or capitalist entrepreneurs who hired labour in addition to doing manual labour on own land. These two classes were clearly exploiters of labour. The distinction between exploiters and exploited was not so clear in case of middle peasants who owned or rented small land area, could provide the bare minimum for the household and farm and in a good season could produce a surplus also. They may also hire labour. Below this class were small peasants who owned or rented small plots of land, were subsistence-oriented and did not employ labour. Below these, were peasants or semi-proletarians who combined wage labour with cultivation on owned or rented land. At the bottom were wage labourers or the agricultural proletariat dependent on working as hired labour to ensure their survival.

The resolution of the agrarian question is conditioned by the evolving structural context shaping and influencing agrarian processes. As such, there is no one manner of its resolution. Over the years, the macro level structural context has significantly changed with attendant consequences for agriculture and rural classes. In the context of decolonisation and within the framework of state led development, different conceptualisations of rural differentiation were furthered. In general, these were articulated with reference to the historical trajectories of agrarian transition, growing commodity production, integration of developing economies into a global economy, access to means of production and regional specificities of land and labour patterns, patterns of accumulation and investment, cropping patterns and production methods, government policies etc. (for example Raikes, 1978; Deere and deJanvry, 1981; Kay, 1981; Akram-Lodhi, 1993). The dominance of neoliberal capitalist globalisation post

1970s has significantly altered the rural landscape and the rural class structure. Some elements of these transformations were highlighted in the previous section.

The approach of agrarian question as developed by Bernstein in the contemporary context, explains features of agrarian neoliberalism (as indicated on pp.19 & 20, for details see Bernstein, 2010, Ch.5), how labour is influenced and deals with differentiation among petty commodity producers. Bernstein approaches the agrarian question from two perspectives, that of capital and labour. He reformulates the classical agrarian question as one of labour in the context of globalisation. As rural labour is the primary focus of this thesis, emphasis will be on locating the agrarian question of labour in changing structural, historical and social contexts. However, given that in the political economy tradition, the analytical category of class is understood as a social relation, this will necessarily require reference to the agrarian question of capital, and as such, this too will be dealt with, albeit only very briefly. After outlining Bernstein's position, a case is made for using it as the theoretical reference point for this study.

2.2.1. Bernstein: The Agrarian Question of Capital and Labour

In Bernstein's (2003, 2004, 2006b, 2008, 2010) view, the classical agrarian question was that of capital, concerned with the establishment of the capitalist mode of production, marked by transformation of feudal landlords into a capitalist class and peasant labour into wage labour. Characterised by generalised commodity production, it entailed transition from a predominantly agricultural to industrial economy by way of investing agrarian surplus into industrial development. Bernstein's argument is that the classical agricultural question of capital has lost its relevance. At their independence, Asian and African colonies were characterised by agricultural petty commodity production and capitalist social relations more generally. Petty commodity producers combine elements of capital and labour and are subject to tendencies of differentiation. Class locations are influenced by other factors like gender or labour and income patterns in families.

Bernstein (2010) has qualified that the establishment of generalised commodity production does not mean complete commodification. In capitalism, those variously

referred to as peasants, small-scale farmers or family farmers are transformed into petty commodity producers (they are not subsistence based family farmers). They combine class locations of capital and labour and depend on subsistence and commercial agriculture and other forms of labour commodification. They are subject to market imperatives. Bernstein refers to this as commodification of subsistence. In addition, it has been suggested that with the shift from developmentalism to conditions of globalisation, industrial growth is in many cases de-linked from the agricultural sector. Developing states are ascribed a minimal role with limited power to redirect agrarian surplus for industrialisation and with trade and financial liberalisation, alternative sources for financing industrialisation are available (Lerche, 2008).

As such, Bernstein has argued that the classical agrarian question of capital, does not exist anymore i.e. it has either been resolved or is not relevant in the present context. Byres (1986, 1996; Lerche, 2008) does not agree with this generalization. For example, according to him, successful capitalist agrarian transition in India is limited mainly to Punjab, Haryana and west Uttar Pradesh. Byres stresses on the possible persistence of pre-capitalist rural classes and modes of appropriation in other regions of India. Byres is one of the most important scholars on the classical agrarian question and the varied trajectories of capitalist agrarian transitions as they occurred in history in different regions. However, Bernstein's contentions are of more relevance for this thesis.

In a Marxian political economy framework, capitalism is a necessary stage towards the establishment of communism. It is a progressive stage based on the central contradiction between capitalists and wage labourers. Both capital and labour had a common interest in dismantling the feudal structure. As such, according to Bernstein (2004), to the extent that a successful capitalist agrarian transformation results in changes in rural social formations, enhances technological productivity and provides a surplus and wage labour for industrialisation (the transition from agricultural to non-agricultural labour), the classical agrarian question of capital is also a question of labour. Bernstein has established that the classical agrarian question is no longer a question of capital. But is there still an agrarian question of labour? What have changes in capitalism meant for an agrarian question of labour? An important element

of the agrarian question of capital was the disintegration of pre-capitalist landed property as a viable political and economic force and this was accomplished (albeit in diverse ways and with somewhat different outcomes) through land reforms. Land reforms remained a significant feature of agricultural policy in the period of state led development i.e. up to the 1970s.

According to Bernstein (2002, 2006b, 2008, 2010) then, from the perspective of labour, the classical agrarian question referred to redistributive land reforms with the state as the main agent of development. Land reforms could take various forms, for example, confiscation and redistribution of ceiling surplus land, conferring title of land on tenant cultivators or nationalisation of large commercial farms and plantations. They were often accompanied with rural development policies such as provisioning social and economic infrastructure like schools and credit facilities, or employment and skill generation programmes etc. These were undertaken either in response to the threat of or actual conflict and unrest. The intention was to deliver social justice, alleviate poverty, lead to development of productive forces in agriculture and thereby generate a surplus which could be directed into industrial development and accumulation. These policies were supported by or made possible by a political alliance between different social classes and an economic rationale where they were perceived as modernising. These agricultural and rural development policies followed different historical trajectories in various regions, but what was mostly common to them was the expansion and increase of commodity production and tendencies of regional and social differentiation (for example see Cleaver, 1972).

Proponents of market led agrarian reforms criticised the state led agenda of land reforms for their huge implementation costs, corruption, bureaucratic legalese, top down approach, distortion of the land market etc. (Borras, 2003). Promoters of neoliberal globalisation further market led land reforms. Borras (2003) summarises the key features of these as follows. Land reforms are envisaged as voluntary i.e. land to be bought from willing buyers rather than state acquisition. The approach is demand driven i.e. those who explicitly want land will benefit and land sales to be negotiated according to the type of land in demand. This was a departure from the earlier expropriation and redistribution model. Other advantages of this model include decentralised implementation allowing transparency and accountability, creation of a

more free, efficient and informed land market and commercial farming is encouraged through the provision of various grant schemes. Subjection to market imperatives and provision of land to small farmers would increase productive efficiency and weed out inefficient farmers.

However, according to Bernstein (2002), underlining this reform agenda, are issues of land commodification and private property rights and the mainstream development rhetoric of ending rural poverty that serves a legitimisation function. Both, Borras (2003) and Bernstein (2002) have criticised this model for completely overlooking the nature of and the interplay between social, economic and political power relations in the countryside that influence land prices, information and financial flows, bargaining position etc. In fact, these reforms are associated with broadening differentiation and creation of a 'bifurcated' agriculture (Akram-Lodhi, et al., 2009b, also see p.36).

Relating the classical agrarian question of labour to the nature of capitalism today, Bernstein (2001, 2002, 2004, 2006b, 2010) suggests the unlikelihood of land reforms based on broad political alliances occurring because ruling classes are no longer dependent on agrarian surplus for industrial development and rural classes of capital and labour no longer subsist on agriculture only. In addition, as petty commodity production reflects possibility of class differentiation, class alliances are likely to be tenuous and temporary. The struggle between classes is limited by within class divisions of caste and gender which mediate experiences of oppression and exploitation. Finally, in view of the changing role of land in agriculture and farming practices and by association, the role of agriculture in the livelihoods of petty commodity producers, the demand for land reforms has given way to questions of capital-labour relations (i.e. understanding labour against capital and not agriculture). The structural context of neoliberal globalisation is marked by capital concentration in advanced economies (mostly) and labour employment and income insecurity and fragmentation. Petty commodity producers simultaneously pursue different employment and income sources, straddling various locations in the social division of labour and are subject to differentiation and exploitation (Lerche, 2010). So, labour is increasingly involved in non-agricultural wage labour to sustain itself but the move is partial as non-agricultural wage labour is undertaken in combination with farming.

This partial move is also indicative of distress and crisis of labour reproduction. Finally, in a country like India this needs to be gendered.

In this scenario, as Bernstein has indicated in his various works mentioned here, it is difficult to envisage a common ground in demanding land reforms. While land continues to be an important buffer against food insecurity and socio-cultural pride is associated with its ownership, the extent to which land reforms can possibly benefit rural labour remains a vexed issue. Also, it is in this context that Bernstein has argued that the demand for land reforms (the classical agrarian question of labour) has lost ground to the relationship between capital and labour and that rural labour is better understood in relation to capital rather than agriculture. As such the classical agrarian question of labour is reconfigured and the structural source of this agrarian question of labour is the increasing insecurity of employment in contemporary capitalism that cannot provide the minimum reproduction costs (Arrighi and Moore cited in Bernstein, 2006b, p.457).

As pointed out earlier, in petty commodity production, the possibility of class differentiation arises from the fact that petty commodity producers combine elements of capital (land, agricultural machinery and implements, seeds etc.) and labour (individuals). This gives rise to the possibility of their disintegration into classes of capital or labour as they pursue reproduction through a variety of combinations of wage labour and self-employment with farming. The process of differentiation is in turn influenced by non-class identities like gender and ethnicity.

Before moving on to Bernstein's schema of social differentiation, it is useful to note that his theorisation based on specificities of class dynamics and accumulation in petty commodity production and relating it to the nature of capitalism is distinct from and adds to the Marxist theorisations which conceptualise classes in terms of capital accumulation, possession of means of production, exploitation of labour and income (for example see, Patnaik, 1987, Ramachandran, et al., 2010, Ramachandran, 2011). What Bernstein's framework does better is to understand the dynamics of rural classes within the capitalist economy and this is why he departs from conceptualisation such as those proposed by Patnaik that still operate in terms of 'peasantry' (subsistence-oriented small/family farmers).

What is the nature of class differentiation among petty commodity producers according to Bernstein?

At the top of the hierarchy, are the petty capitalists, rich farmers or emergent capitalists, able to reproduce themselves as capital over a prolonged period of time. They pursue diverse economic activities and are an accumulating class (Bernstein, 2010). Theoretically these are distinct from big capitalists as defined by Patnaik (1987) and Ramchandran, et al., (2010). Bernstein (2010), while not focussing on them, has not denied their existence either. This is noted here because empirically, the distinction between these two is not always clear (for example, see Rakshit (2011) who has argued that after a certain level, land size becomes irrelevant for productivity). This thesis is not about why this is so, but rather that this is the case. I will return to this point in chapter six.

Bernstein's (2010) second stratum is composed of petty producers or medium farmers. These combine family and wage labour and are able to reproduce on a simple basis. They are not an accumulating class. These farmers may hire wage labour or they themselves work as wage labour on others farms as and when needed, may lease in or lease out land as a part of various sharecropping arrangements. They exploit wage labour, but can also be exploited themselves as the boundaries between middle and poor farmers or rural labour are blurred. At the bottom are classes of labour. These are unable to reproduce themselves as capital and increasingly find it difficult to secure their survival on a daily basis. To achieve this, they variously combine insecure and exploitative forms of labour commodification, self-employment activities and other non-remunerative but value adding work with small-scale farming. In the process, they reflect a high degree of mobility across different production locations and positions in the social division of labour.

To reiterate, this process of labour fragmentation/class differentiation is underscored by social, economic and political factors like gender; caste; access to and control over resources; changing farming practices and production costs; marginalisation and proletarianisation of middle farmers; role of livelihood diversification and so on. Classes are understood as dynamic categories.

Following Bernstein's development of the classical agrarian question and his perspective on social differentiation, it is now clear that the category of agricultural labour has been rendered redundant. The erstwhile agricultural labour is best understood as classes of labour and the agrarian question of labour is that of a reproduction problematic resulting in a crisis of labour (Silver & Arrighi, 2001).

2.2.2. Why Bernstein?

There are several reasons for choosing Bernstein as the theoretical reference point for this study. Firstly, Bernstein clearly theorises and links the evolving nature of capitalism to labour. Secondly, he provides concrete categories which can be used as analytical tools rather than simply seeing petty commodity producers as a homogenous or fuzzy category to which are attributed general features like footloose nature, deagrarianisation, proletarianisation and so on. Thirdly, given that the subject of this thesis is rural labour, Bernstein's preoccupation with petty commodity producers and the nature of their differentiation made it very suitable to delineating who actually constituted rural labour and their characteristics. The focus on petty commodity producers is aptly suited to the economic structure and predominance of smallholders in the fieldwork area.

Fourthly, his concept of classes of labour captures the ground reality i.e. the increasingly fluid class locations that may combine elements of capital and labour and the possibility and complexity of internal differentiation within class categories. His derivation can be used to understand most of the empirical class categories documented in the field-sites. This is not to deny the existence of comparatively large capitalist farmers as indicated earlier, but theoretical distinctions do not map onto empirical reality very neatly. Finally, that analytical categories other than class may underline the process of class differentiation is easily related to the Indian context.

So far, we have dealt with issues of rural change under conditions of neoliberal globalisation and the nature of social differentiation through the approach of the classical agrarian question. We have also described Bernstein's reformulation of the classical agrarian question. Continuing with this approach as a tool to focus on labour, the following section considers some alternative interpretations on how neoliberalism

has changed the classic agrarian question. The purpose will be to compare how these interpretations understand labour vis-à-vis Bernstein, whether they extend analytical tools which can be operationalised in fieldwork.

2.3. Agrarian Questions and Labour in Neoliberal Globalisation

So far, two positions on the agrarian question have been considered. Bernstein believes that the classical agrarian question of capital is either bypassed or not relevant in today's structural context. Byres position was only briefly stated as not being in agreement with Bernstein. Byres has extensively written on the subject, but suffice it to indicate here that, in the context of India, he believes that successful capitalist agrarian transition has not uniformly occurred and the classic agrarian question of capital is still relevant. Byre's position is not detailed because the issue here is not whether or not the agrarian question has been resolved and in what manner, but how is it understood today and its relevance as a framework to conduct an enquiry as proposed in the thesis objective.

This section is organised as follows. It begins with a defence of Bernstein against criticisms of his approach. The section then discusses O'Laughlin's (1996, 1998, 2009) interpretation of the agrarian question which shows certain similarities with Bernstein's view. In relation to O'Laughlin, it is also explained why gender theory is not used as a theoretical reference point for this thesis. Akram-Lodhi, et al., (2009b) and McMichael (2006, 2008, 2009) believe that the agrarian question has changed. The former argue that the classical agrarian question is still being resolved and they posit the contemporary agrarian question as that of political economy of land. McMichael critiques the classical conceptualisation of agrarian question for its pre-occupation with the problematic of capital accumulation and assumption of peasant elimination in the process. He posits the contemporary agrarian question from the perspective of 'agrarians' as one of food sovereignty. Together, these three views provide a glimpse of the variety of literature existing on the agrarian question today and how such a framework can be utilised to gain an insight into agrarian developments. There are other important interpretations of the agrarian question, but it is not possible to mention them all here (See Akram-Lodhi, et al., 2009a; Akram-Lodhi & Kay, 2010b).

One criticism of Bernstein is the lack of attention given to social agents and perception of agriculture as serving the needs of capital. This implies a functionalist approach as the possibility of changes in agriculture is tied to capitalist requirements (Murmis, 2006). Secondly, labour indeed is adversely affected but Bernstein does not make clear how this crisis of labour links to the agricultural sector or the overall economy (Murmis, 2006). Thirdly, Bernstein is criticised for not having sufficiently elaborated on the spectrum of production relations that a fragmented labour is likely to be involved in and the types of capital they interact with (Murmis, 2006). Finally, Bernstein's assertion on the disintegration of peasantry has also been criticised (Murmis, 2006; Friedmann, 2006).

It is not true that Bernstein does not consider social actors or posits a functionalist approach. The possibility of how pre-capitalist structures may face pressure from external influences leading to transformations in the countryside is not denied. For example, Byres (1996) analysis shows that in the Prussian path, French invasion and consequent state action were important factors in the abolition of serfdom. Bernstein's (1996) review of Byres (1996) seminal work on agrarian transitions in different historical contexts is evidence to his awareness of the role of rural classes in agrarian transformations. Bernstein also refers to bio-technology corporate interests, agro-monopolies etc. as specific players involved in 'upstream' and 'downstream' of agribusiness, though he does not explore this in detail.²

The second criticism does not hold. Bernstein (2003, 2006a, 2006b, 2007, 2010) explicitly establishes linkages between the macro economic context, agriculture and labour. In his various works, Bernstein extends few theses which clearly show these links. He identifies several features of agrarian neoliberalism: trade liberalisation, absence of state support to small farmers, technological and organisational changes in farming, domination of agricultural activities 'upstream and 'downstream' by international agricultural corporations etc. Bernstein locates the crisis of labour in this context: labour finds it increasingly difficult to secure its survival from farming and combines this with other exploitative and unstable employment and income sources.

² Bernstein (2010) has defined 'upstream' as including activities essential for farming to take place, including access to various inputs. 'Downstream' refers to activities after production, for example, processing or marketing.

Regarding the third criticism, it is certainly not possible to go into regional specificities and map the entire range of relations of production or the types of capital that classes of labour are engaged in. In addition to providing a model to understand the capitalist social relations of production, Bernstein (2003, 2006a, 2006b, 2007, 2010) does identify several general types of relations of production and their characteristics. For instance, classes of labour combine farming, wage labour and self-employment activities to ensure their daily reproduction. This takes place across different sites of production and division of labour, under insecure and exploitative conditions. He indicates the existence of different types of capital and the dominant agents of capitalist agriculture, but does not explore this area in detail. Bernstein does not deny the importance of classes of capital as is evident in his use of class as a social relation.

Under the changed contours of agriculture and associated implications for rural social formations, Bernstein (2006b, 2003) has argued that the category peasantry, implying subsistence oriented small/family farmers, is not analytically useful anymore. This does not imply the elimination of subsistence altogether but that small farmers are increasingly unable to meet the minimal reproduction costs from farming and have to necessarily engage in other market or commodity relations. It would be wrong to perceive the category of classes of labour as a modified form of peasantry in the present context. The notion of classes of labour is rooted in Bernstein's understanding of petty commodity producers, combining elements of capital and labour, with the possibility of differentiating into classes of capital and labour.

Moving on, I will now discuss three alternative analyses of the agrarian question and why this thesis was not located in these approaches.

2.3.1. Bridget O'Laughlin: Gendered Agrarian Question

Bridget O'Laughlin (1996, 1998, 2009) agrees with Bernstein on several fronts: (i) formulation of the agrarian question in relation with the structural context of neoliberal capitalism (ii) in this phase, capitalism is no longer dependent on agriculture for labour (iii) labour is fragmented, mobile, and combines agricultural and non-agricultural employment under oppressive conditions (iv) declining

analytical utility of older categories/binaries, for example, it is difficult to establish a clear division between labour hiring or labouring households or allocate unambiguous fixed class categories or to talk in terms of a unified peasantry vis-à-vis large capitalist enterprises (v) processes of differentiation are shaped by gender.

O’Laughlin’s (1996, 1998, 2009) main contention is the absence of a gendered analysis of the agrarian question. It is established that patterns of production and accumulation have to be understood in relation to neoliberal globalisation and capital-labour relations in this phase. What is often overlooked is how gender, understood as a social relation of domination and subordination, contributes to production and accumulation, thereby forging new socio-economic alliances that enable individual and household reproduction.

Arguing against the mainstream discourse on land rights in the South African context, O’Laughlin (2009) highlights the historical importance of non-commodified agricultural production and informal associations in reproduction. Individualism and commodification are central tenets of neoliberalism. This ignores some of the crucial ways in which South Africans get access to land under customary law, through membership of local political or community associations. Mainstream analyses also overlook how social networks formed through these organisations help in production process when required, particularly in view of the AIDS epidemic and they also serve as important forums for debate on various issues. Female participation in formal political and legal institutions is uncommon. In addition, a private property regime tends to remove women producers from control over land.

At the same time, O’Laughlin cautions against idealising the above. There exist problems with such a land structure. The small holding size is barely enough to provide for the households and cannot arrest the diversification of rural livelihoods. Ambiguous ownership means that land cannot be used as collateral. Nonetheless, drawing on secondary literature from various regions, O’Laughlin argues that land does serve as a necessary buffer against absolute poverty, exploitative and stigmatised wage labour, particularly in the case of marginalised sections of the society like women and widows. In her earlier works, (O’Laughlin, 1996, 1998) has elaborated on the emergence of a gendered division of labour with rural social differentiation. This

is evident in the patterns of rural diversification and migrant systems, though there are instances where these have been successfully contested by women. O’Laughlin is right in that implementation of the neoliberal land reform agenda serves its anti-poverty or human rights rhetoric and diverts from a critical appraisal of structural causes and distributional consequences. For instance, it does not question what causes poverty or who benefits from land privatisation and why.

O’Laughlin’s view highlights why a focus as that of this thesis is important, but I argue that it cannot replace Bernstein’s reconstruction of the agrarian question. Her view highlights importance of a gendered focus. However, it is not clear why or how this is of more or equal importance as a core analytical focus, as is class. Class relations and accumulation conditions take into account existing social relations, including gender relations. The political economy of agrarian change, as explored by Bernstein (2010), does not ignore the dimensions of gender (Razavi, 2009), non-commodified work or inequalities within the household which are some of the major pre-occupations of those working with a gender perspective or feminist theory. Bernstein explicitly acknowledges their importance in shaping class differentiation, though he does not elaborate on them and justifiably so.

O’Laughlin’s work does serve to train our focus on nuances that should be considered in doing such a research as is intended here-to what extent can gender explain differences in development trajectories of classes of labour? Does diversification of rural livelihoods apply as much to female labour as to male labouring classes? As was mentioned previously, O’Laughlin reflects important similarities with Bernstein’s, but does not offer the theoretical and analytical rigour of Bernstein. For example, Bernstein provides a better insight regarding the defining features of neoliberal globalisation and how this manifests into a crisis of labour. His understanding of differentiation takes into account rural diversification, the contribution of non-remunerated (but value adding) activities to reproduction, role of non-class identities like gender and ethnicity, the fluidity of class positions. In other words, it provides a more comprehensive framework and more importantly, it extends analytical tools which can be operationalised in fieldwork.

2.3.2. Akram-Lodhi, Kay and Borras: Agrarian Question of Land

Akram-Lodhi, et al., (2009b) approach the agrarian question by studying how and to what extent neoliberal capitalism restructures production and accumulation and how existing class relations shape the above process and are reconstituted through it. This analysis is done by analyzing land relations. It has been previously (see pg.7) highlighted how market led agrarian reforms sought to commodify and privatise land rights. According to Akram-Lodhi, et al. (2009b) behind the neoliberal agenda of land reforms were the motives of multinational corporations and rural capitalists to secure well-defined, stable and individual land rights to establish global production and supply networks in the former case and to secure stable links in these in the latter case. As such, the drive for land reflected the drive for profit and a study of land relations show how production and accumulation patterns transformed with changing structural and dominant class imperatives.

As Akram-Lodhi, et al., (2009b) explain neoliberal agrarian restructuring has resulted in the creation of a 'bifurcated' agriculture composed of an export-oriented capital intensive sub-sector and a labour intensive peasant sector. The two are differentiated in terms of the extent of commodification and the extent to which they are subjected to market imperatives. The export-oriented sector is commoditised, profit-oriented and subjected to market forces. Land is important as indicated in the previous paragraph, but more revealing is how the sub-sector is positioned in the international 'circuits of capital' (such as global production and supply chains) controlled by dominant classes. The peasant sub-sector reflects heterogeneity. Differences in terms of technological utilisation, scale economies and possibility of a surplus above household consumption lead to differentiation among peasants. As production may either be for subsistence and/or for markets (local or regional), farmers are differentially subjected to market imperatives. For farmers more closely integrated with markets, land ownership is of importance, but it is the dominant classes who effectively control the labour process and regulate markets. Land access is crucial for farmers who are less integrated with the market. But if this access is through landowners, then even in this case, surplus will be appropriated by the landowners.

Alongside these two sectors, there is an ongoing process of semiproletarianization (Akram-Lodhi, et al., 2009b; Akram-Lodhi & Kay, 2010b) seen in the case of peasants who cultivate tiny plots of land for food security. Their subsistence orientation does not mean that they operate outside the market realm. Rather, their dependence on the sale of their labour power for survival means that they are as much subject to the market logic as other peasants. This is akin to Bernstein's notion of commodification of subsistence. This stratum of peasants is different from other peasants in that instead of producing for sale, they sell their labour power and ability to generate a surplus. These peasants also reflect socio-economic variation depending upon the advance of the neoliberal agenda in specific regional contexts.

In the classical agrarian question, changing land access (primitive accumulation) was critical in the resolution of the agrarian question. The crucial role that land plays in capitalist accumulation and labour proletarianisation is evident in its current manifestation (Akram-Lodhi, et al., 2009b). It points to the possibility of the continued salience of the classical agrarian question. For example, Akram-Lodhi & Kay (2010b) cite the example of how the Chinese demand for agricultural commodities drives capitalist transformation and accumulation in supplier countries. In this instance, agriculture has not become irrelevant to accumulation. But as Akram-Lodhi and Kay mention in the same article, Bernstein's 'decoupled agrarian question of labour' would point out that capitalist development in China is not dependent on accumulation from Chinese agriculture and therefore what remains in China is an agrarian question of labour.

More importantly, the reconstruction of the agrarian question in terms of political economy of land does not extend any theorisation on the processes of class formation. According to them, farmers in peasant sub-sector produce 'for the market, for use or for both' (Akram-Lodhi, et al., 2009b, p.228), but they do not elaborate on peasants who produce for use, whether they are subjected to market imperatives or not, to what extent, how are they different from the semi-proletariats? They do not exclude the possibility of linkages between sub-sectors but do not theoretically substantiate the implied possibility of class movement across these.

2.3.3. Philip McMichael: Agrarian Question of Food

McMichael (1997, 2006, 2008, 2010) finds the classical agrarian question and its contemporary reformulations problematic for several reasons. First, they are narrowly focussed on the problem of accumulation and the process of class formation. Second, they see the peasantry as redundant or project a depoliticised version of it by ignoring the important historical role that peasantry played in the creation of a protected agriculture in nineteenth century and the role they now play in challenging the 'corporate food regime'. Thirdly, the classical agrarian question was restricted to the terrain of the nation-state which ignored important ongoing global processes such as imperialism and its role in shaping international trade.

For McMichael (1997, 2006, 2008, 2010) then, the present agrarian question has to be situated in the context of financialization, neoliberalism and corporate food regime and refers to global peasant struggles over the terms and conditions of access and control over food.³ La Via Campesina and the Landless Rural Workers' Movement in Brazil are examples of such transnational agrarian mobilizations. The objective of such movements is to secure food security, access to land and formulation of agricultural and related policies, sensitive to local contexts, by producers themselves. In this reconstruction of the agrarian question, the 'nation/class problematic....becomes increasingly residual in (or at least subordinate to) an emerging global/peasant problematic' (McMichael, 1997, p.648). It seeks to provide a political analysis of global capitalist agriculture by showing how the current food regime not only reflects class relations but more importantly how it leads to poverty and dispossession due to privatisation and commodification, environmental degradation, increased migration, objectification of the peasant as backward etc.

³ Financialization refers to the dominance of finance capital in this neoliberal phase of capitalism. Neoliberalism refers to a political programme based on neoclassical economic theory that gives primacy to markets and envisages a reduced role for the state in growth and development. By corporate food regime is meant the regulation and control of global agriculture as institutionalized by the World Trade Organization. Some features are: producer subsidies in advanced countries but not in developing countries, market led land reforms, trade liberalisation that allows cheap imports to be dumped in developing countries leading to depressed prices, patenting of traditional knowledge systems by multinational agribusinesses, production and organizational patterns that have adverse effects for ecology etc.

Both Bernstein and McMichael agree that the agrarian question relates to the struggle over reproduction and livelihoods, albeit from different perspectives. Both identify features of the current agricultural regime that are related to a crisis of reproduction and livelihoods. However, while Bernstein accords a central importance to class analysis, McMichael (1997, 2006, 2008, 2010) explicitly rejects this in favour of struggles against transnational food regimes. He sees his framework as arguing for a different type of modernity focussed on social and ecological justice. This should not be equated with peasant essentialism or backwardness. McMichael is critical of Bernstein's casting of peasants as petty commodity producers which denies the possibility of global peasant struggles in view of fragmented classes of labour. Rather than focussing on the capital-wage labour contradiction, McMichael's framework claims to bring agriculture to the centre of the present agrarian crisis and posit the agrarian question from the perspective of the 'agrarians' i.e. the marginalised farmers.

McMichael makes an important contribution to debates on agrarian political economy but his framework is not suited to the objectives of this study. This thesis is located in a political economy approach that privileges the class as an analytical category. McMichael's framework is against this. It does not provide any analytical tools with which to approach the category of rural labour as the subject of study. It is accepted that Bernstein does not theorise on labour struggles. McMichael's agrarian question approach draws on contemporary peasant movements, identifies their critique of the corporate food regime and their objectives. But he does not extend an empirically informed conceptual framework which could be used to define, map and analyse contemporary labour struggles at various levels and in different contexts. As such, it provides useful insights but is not conceptually enabling in doing research.

McMichael's faith in 'peasant possibility' as expressed in multinational social movements based on a common solidarity is difficult to empirically map onto micro level work as intended here. For McMichael, the agrarian question takes into account micro-politics as well because it believes that peasants and small peasant movements can associate their conditions as having derived from a particular macro-level political context. On the other hand, these transnational networks are sensitive to local social, economic and ecological concerns. While it recognises the existence of unequal gender, class, caste and regional power relations, albeit secondary to the

‘global/peasant’ contradiction, it does not consider how these may preclude the emergence of any solidarity at micro, meso or macro levels or the possibility of such movements being transient, fragile or susceptible to co-optation by vested interests in a diverse peasantry. Additionally, this projects a homogeneous peasantry by assuming that capitalist processes impact all similarly rather than being mediated by factors like land position, gender, ethnicity, access to off-farm employment etc. Nonetheless, McMichael’s has made an important contribution, drawing attention to the food and ecological crises resulting from this neoliberal political-economic conjuncture.

Together, these three interpretations of the agrarian question provide broad sense of agrarian change and how labour is implicated in this era of neoliberalism. They highlight the importance of non-class factors like gender, land and food in understanding the conditions and experiences of the labouring poor. They emphasise the utility of using the agrarian question approach. However, for reasons specified above, neither is considered as relevant or conceptually and analytically strong as Bernstein’s model. Having established this, the next section focuses on the Indian context. It reviews class analyses by some prominent scholars and juxtaposes the rural class structure proposed by them with Bernstein’s framework. It argues that Bernstein’s understanding of differentiation in petty commodity producers offers the best possible framework for conceptualising labour and is very much applicable to the Indian reality.

2.4. A Survey of Empirically Informed Class Analyses in the Indian Context

The class structure of rural India has been widely debated and there is no agreement on any one class structure as being representative of the Indian countryside. Alice Thorner (1982) has explained this as inevitable given India’s regional diversity and the varying objectives of scholars. In the Indian context, Marxist studies have either attempted to determine class compositions on a purely economic basis of landholding size or have attempted to combine this with other characteristics in deriving classes (see p.28). In either case, classes so derived have been subject to criticisms for diverse reasons.

There are many perspectives on the structure of agrarian class relations in India. It is not possible to detail them all here. Some of these viewpoints refer to aspects of rural class structure in their broader scheme of things. For example, in analysing economic stagnation in India in the 1980s, Bardhan (1984) wrote of a class of rich farmers as an organized and politically powerful interest group influencing state policies. Another example is that of John Harriss (1999) who highlighted the high degree of caste and class overlap in rural India, while analysing how the character of ‘political regimes’ influenced state performance. Agrarian change and processes of class differentiation were not the direct concerns of these analyses.⁴ Though they referred to some elements of class relations in Indian agriculture, they are overall unsuitable for a class based study of rural labour as proposed in this thesis. Some other scholars such as Patanik, Rudra, Beteille, Breman and Harriss-white, who have either been directly concerned with the nature of agrarian change and its implications for rural classes or made important interventions on the topic, are more important for this research objective. They are discussed below.

2.4.1. Utsa Patnaik: Peasant Differentiation to Peasant Pauperisation

Operating with an agrarian political economy approach, Patnaik (1986) argued that capitalist development in Indian agriculture was controlled by landlords and it retained semi-feudal characteristics such as caste oppression. Patnaik (1976, 1987, 1988) also argued that the green revolution in India had increased tendencies of rural class differentiation. In her definition of class, exploitation is the primary variable. Arguing against traditional Marxian notions of class based on just landholding size or initial resource endowments, she asserts that class position is also influenced by factors like family size, cropping pattern and intensity of cultivation, level of technology employed etc. One indication of this is the extent to which a household hires outside labour and the extent to which the household members work for others. This and the exploitation criteria are used in Patnaik’s method of labour use index for identifying classes is based.

⁴ Athreya, et. al., (1990) trace developments in agriculture in rural Tamil Nadu, implications for labour relations and identify agrarian classes on the basis of surplus production. However, their methodology is complex and does not render itself well for a qualitative work such as this.

Based on this, Patnaik (1976, 1987), identified five rural classes. At the top are the big landlords with large resource endowments who undertake no manual labour and depend on hired labour. The peasantry is differentiated. Rich peasants, like big landlords, are an accumulating and exploitative class, but they do some manual labour on their farms and equally depend on hired labour. The middle peasantry is primarily dependent on family labour and is subsistence oriented. Though self-employment is the most important element here, middle peasants may be further sub-classified as upper and middle peasants. The former are net exploiters of labour as they hire some labour and are able to generate and retain small surpluses. The latter do not hire labour at all and therefore are not exploiters. Since, it is more difficult to ensure subsistence, they may resort to wage labour to supplement self-employment and as such, they themselves are exploited to some extent.

The fourth class identified by Patnaik (1976, 1987) is that of poor peasants whose subsistence is dependent on working for others, irrespective of whether they own some land or not, as wage labourers or lessees. Poor peasants again can be subdivided into two categories. A petty tenant makes rent payments and is less dependent on wage labour. An agricultural labour cultivates a tract of land, whether owned or rented, but is more dependent on wage labour. Poor peasants are barely able to meet their reproduction costs. At the bottom are the landless or full-time labourers having no resource endowments and therefore no self-employment possibility. They are completely dependent on working for others. In comparison to poor peasants, full time labourers face even greater uncertainty in securing survival. It is the strata of poor peasants and full-time labourers that constitute 'rural labour' for Patnaik.

Since the derivation of labour-exploitation criterion in the 1970s, the context in which rural classes of capital and labour operate has changed profoundly. Debates on the dominant mode of production in Indian agriculture and the continued relevance or irrelevance of 'peasantry' are central pre-occupations of agrarian political economy. At that conjuncture, Patnaik's method was advantageous. Importantly, she argued against a reductionist class definition and asserted the differentiation in the peasantry. Patnaik (1976, 1988) highlighted possible problems with her framework. Firstly, it was applicable only to cultivating households and omitted households not engaged in cultivation such as widows or the old. In such cases, she qualified that the exploitation

criteria be used as 'first-stage' classification method and other variables such as ownership of means of production or scale of hired labour be added on as required. She also indicated the limited utility of this approach in situations of weak differentiation or where factors like caste are over-determining. She extends a static model that captures class locations at any given point of time. Patnaik considers agrarian relations outside the production process as secondary to those arising within the production process and therefore does not consider how classes interact with the market or are involved in exploitative relations outside the immediate production process. She agrees that these would need to be studied for any dynamic conception tracing changes over time.

It is felt that Bernstein's formulation overcomes these problems. It is based on a consideration of means of production, labour use patterns, surplus/deficit situation and combinations of labour commodifications, self-employment activities and non-remunerated activities. These are important contributions to survival, though they are not without their attendant forms of exploitation or even very limited mutual benefits as in the case of debt maximisation or buffer against food insecurity within patron-client relations of neo-bondage. Unlike Patnaik, he takes into account commodity relations of labouring poor outside cultivation. In an era where agriculture has a declining role in rural livelihoods, an empirically derived model of class classification has to take into account other commodity relations and overlapping socio-economic relations outside of agriculture that are central to the rural poor. Also, Bernstein's is a dynamic conceptualisation that can capture shifting class positions and trace changes over time, unlike Patnaik's formulation. He explicitly states that non-class factors like gender and ethnicity underscore processes of class differentiation. Bernstein's model appears as a closer approximation of the present ground reality presented in the opening section of this chapter.

In recent years, Patnaik (2006) seems to have made a shift in her position from stressing on peasant differentiation to peasantry similarly affected by the onslaught of agrarian neoliberalism, resulting in its pauperisation. In so doing, the idea of differentiation is displaced by a peasant-globalisation contradiction as expressed by McMichael (see pp.15-17). She establishes the current agrarian crisis in India to be the outcome of Indian government's pursuit of neoliberal policies for more than two

decades now (Patnaik, 2006, 2010). Key features of this mainstream policy are identified as roll-backs in public expenditure on agricultural subsidies and rural infrastructure, as instituted by the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and multinational corporations engaged in agricultural activities ‘upstream’ and ‘downstream’. The outcomes are increasing unemployment and labour flexibility (leading to increased mobility, fragmentation), declining incomes from farming given rising production costs, increased debt burden culminating in suicides of farmers in some cases, land dispossession, commodification of traditionally common resources and decreased purchasing power and shifting land use have undermined food security.

In this scenario, according to Patnaik (2006), the emerging new contradiction is between ‘all the toiling masses and imperialism.’ She highlights the emergence of peasant struggles against this drive, but does not elaborate much on this aspect, beyond emphasising on the adoption of policies that will allow the labouring poor to live a life of dignity and expansion of internal markets for growth (Patnaik, 2010). In this analysis, the idea of differentiation as Patnaik elaborated in her earlier work seems to have lost importance.

2.4.2. Ashok Rudra: The Big Landowners-Agricultural Labourers Contradiction

On the question of agrarian transition in India, Rudra (1978a), argued that trajectory of capitalist agrarian development in India showed features of both the Prussian and American paths as identified by Lenin (see p.21). He also argued that features relating to tenancy, money lending and attached labour have to be qualified before being labelled as feudal (Rudra, 1978b). Finally, Rudra (1978c) distinguished between class and social groups, the former being defined by a distinct contradiction i.e. in opposition to each other, unlike the latter. From this followed his proposition of the dualistic class character of Indian agriculture, rejecting the view of class differentiation. Rudra has qualified that his classification should not be taken to mean the absence of rich or poor peasants. Rather, these are social groups and not classes. Contradictions are contained within the social group or the contradictions between the two clearly identified classes are not strong enough. Analytically then it is not useful to identify these as separate classes.

The primary contradiction he identified was between big landowners and the class of agricultural labourers who are exploited by the former. Big landowners constitute a single class, albeit unevenly developed and therefore referred to as a hybrid class by Rudra. This class reflects great internal variation-landowners combining capitalist and feudal characteristics to varying degrees, landlords, tenants or rich peasants. However, there is no contradiction among landowners or between landlords completely dependent on hired labour or leasing out of land and rich peasants primarily dependent on hired labour but who participate in cultivation. These are better understood as social groups. Similarly nothing is to be gained by distinguishing between landlords and tenants as in the Indian context often middle and big farmers are part tenants as well. Agricultural labourers comprises landless and those small owners who do not hire labour to considerable extent. Here also there are various social groups like poor tenants and poor labourers, but the contradiction is very weak.

There are exceptions such as economically weak small landowners who nonetheless hire labour because of caste reasons. These do not belong to any class. According to Rudra, the category of middle peasants who are dependent on family labour i.e. they are neither exploiters nor exploited, is not a typical category of Indian agriculture. Where a substantial amount of hiring in or out of labour exists, they appear as a part of either of the two classes identified.

Rudra's formulation has been rightly criticised for undermining the contradiction between feudal and capitalist elements in landowners and for denying the importance of middle class farmers as a class category (Bardhan, 1979). If the feudal elements (for example, labour bondage or unproductive investment) in a landowner are dominant, capitalist development is restricted. Bardhan argues that the size of middle peasants varies regionally and though based on family labour, they do hire labour to meet shortfalls due to demographic changes in the family or in peak season time. Middle farmers corner the benefits of government provisions. As such, they are in contradiction with big landowners, and it may be weak or strong. More importantly, his description does not map onto the contemporary reality of social differentiation, fluid class locations, labour mobility and fragmentation to which Bernstein's theorisation is better suited.

2.4.3. Andre Beteille: Socio-Economic Stratification or Class Analysis?

Andre Beteille (1996, 2007) proposed his analysis of a rural society at a time (1960s) when caste was the dominant theme in village based empirical studies in India. He defined class in terms of ownership of the means of production. This was also the phase when India was witness to great social and political transformations. This made him acknowledge the importance of caste, income and occupational differences in any class analysis. He also makes the reader aware of how these divisions restrict the emergence of class consciousness in a Marxian sense, rather than resulting in increased class polarisation. This was enabled by the commodification and opening up of the village economy, along with land reforms and other public initiatives, which led to increased differentiation between and among capitalists and labourers. Fragmentation and mobility of a 'pure' capital and labour class, as traditionally understood, also limited class action. On the other hand, increasing rural social differentiation progressively weakened a strict overlap of caste, class and power. Though still unequal, it is no longer the exclusive preserve of the dominant.

Based on his fieldwork carried out in Sripuram village in Tanjore in Tamil Nadu in the 1960s, Beteille (1996) described the agrarian class structure as composed of landowners, tenants and agricultural labourers.

Three types of landowners were identified: mainly urban based absentee landowners, village based non-cultivating landowners and resident small holders either directly or closely involved with cultivation (for example, through supervision). Below the landowners are tenants who lease in land, make all production investments and pay a pre-decided quantity of the produce. The terms and conditions of tenancy vary with the type of land and crop grown. Tenants again show internal differentiation. Large tenants secure several acres on lease on a more or less permanent basis, sublet part of it and cultivate the rest by hired labour. Small tenants lease in small plots for shorter durations and are usually reliant on family labour. At the bottom of the rural class hierarchy are agricultural labourers. They may or may not own land. Unlike tenants, agricultural labourers are dependent on daily wages and make no capital for investment except where as owners of bullocks and ploughs they are paid slightly higher wages.

Andre Beteille's work on agrarian class structure is historically significant and indicative of trends like emergence of new classes, intra-class differentiation, fluidity regarding class position, occupational multiplicity etc. It is rich in descriptive detail but given the context and period in which most of his work was done, the conceptual categories he developed then do not apply now and even then they did not foreground enough explanation for the processes he identified. Patnaik (1987) has challenged Beteille's class categories for being of little analytical value because it does not take into consideration exploitation in deriving classes. Classes so derived are theoretically confusing because a landowner could be a landlord or tenant and a tenant could be a middle or small peasant.

Beteille himself makes evident the limitations of his formulation when he remarks that individuals cannot be rigidly classified under any one category, but have 'multiple class affiliation' (Beteille, 1996, p.118). For example, a labourer may also be a tenant at any given point of time. He also talks of class circulation. For instance, a tenant may buy land and become an owner-cultivator in the next season. In this case then, as Patnaik (1987) pointed out, Beteille's formulation has more descriptive rather than theoretical relevance. It does not provide categories by which individuals can be classified in one particular class. If land ownership is the principal criterion for defining classes, then on what basis should a landowner be classified as a landlord or an agricultural labourer? Is it landholding size in combination with factors like participation in labour process, cultivation practices, occupational patterns (factors highlighted by Beteille himself) etc.? If both capitalist and labouring classes diversify into other types of employment, then what should be the defining criteria? These are not elaborated.

Moreover, he refers to class circulation but does not adequately explain the conditions under which it takes place, what nature does it assume and its implications for wider social relations other than diluting class consciousness and preventing class conflict. These are important points and Bernstein's conceptualisation of petty commodity production is able to capture these very dynamics along strong theorisation of different classes based on accumulation. Also, class analysis cannot just be limited to a consideration of the ownership of means of production without explaining the

processes of surplus creation and appropriation. This makes his conceptualisation of rural agrarian classes weak because it does not explain how the classes owning means of production sustain and reproduce.

Beteille's work claims to extend a class analysis from a Marxist perspective. However, it does not explain how systemic exclusion and exploitation allow a minority to appropriate from the subordinated majority. How and why is the resource structure skewed in favour of capitalists? In what type of structural context and power relations do the various classes operate? How is the dominance of a minority sustained? These are important questions for any political economy analysis. Bernstein's analysis does this well. One is left to wonder, whether Beteille's work is more indicative of the features of socio-economic groups which he ranked hierarchically based on his fieldwork rather than a class analysis per se.

2.4.4. Jan Breman: Capitalism and Labour Exploitation

Breman has worked on rural labour relations in India for more than forty years. Steeped in ethnographical tradition, his historical account of changing rural class relations in Gujarat is seminal. The biggest problem with Breman and one that makes his work unsuitable for the stated purpose here is that he does not give much attention to theory and conceptual categories. Nonetheless, based on a reading of Breman (1985, 1994, 2003, 2007) it can be concluded that his work is grounded in a class analysis. Broadly, three themes can be identified. First, agricultural modernisation and associated rural development is associated with class differentiation and diversification of rural economy. Related to this is the second aspect which traces the impact on labouring classes of changing accumulation patterns. The third theme is that of increased labour mobility and fragmentation along regional and communal lines. The overriding concern of Breman is to show how capitalist processes and class inequality (overlapping with caste) result in exploitation and pauperisation of agrarian labour and proletarianization of migrant workers.

In one of his early works, Breman (1985) referred to small owners, middle and large farmers and landless proletariat. The class of large (above 15 acres) farmers are identified as the main drivers and beneficiaries of agrarian change and associated rural

developments. This class is also the dominant regional caste. Large farmers either occupy or are in a position to influence political authority and accumulation from agriculture is invested in alternative acquisitions such as better jobs and education.

Middle farmers (5-15 acres) are also usually from similar caste background. Their holdings are not as fragmented as in the case of landless proletariat. Like the large farmers, middle farmers also reflect economic diversification. Their upper caste status and social networks are crucial in enabling their access to better non-agricultural employment opportunities. Nevertheless, agriculture continues to be the main source of livelihood for a majority of middle farmers. Though numerically dominant, small landowners (less than five acres) represented a very small share in the overall land structure. Small landowners are usually from middle to lower castes. Majority of these were marginal owners with holdings of less than two acres. Dependent on family labour, small landowners also undertook wage labour. Debt is a common and in certain cases, could result in land dispossession. These farmers lack capital and are excluded from access to markets and resources, institutional support etc. At the same time, small landowners prevent absolute impoverishment by simultaneously engaging in employment made available as a result of diversification of rural economy.

The landless proletariat is the largest class composed mainly of tribals. They are dependant upon low waged agricultural labour for their reproduction and seek to supplement this with other casual labour across different locations. In his later work (2007), Breman has highlighted how the neoliberal regime reinforces this. In a situation of surplus labour competing for scarce employment opportunities, non-class affiliations like caste, region, religion acquire great significance in accessing even the most exploitative and insecure jobs. This fragmentation and circulation of labouring class prevents any collective action and weakens its bargaining power.

Breman is an extremely important scholarly reference for any work on labour relations in India. His description of how capital accumulates, dominates, exploits and prevents labour resistance is as useful as a reference point in studying and comparing labour rural labour relations elsewhere in India. It serves as a good guide to a researcher on what to look out for in fieldwork. But as stated earlier its lack of theorisation leaves one with no conceptual tools to work with. Breman's work is also

limited on the gender front. Though he highlights their marginalisation in the labour market and their 'double burden', this is not accorded much attention. For example, how gender shapes and is shaped by class relations is not investigated.

2.4.5. Barbara Harriss-White: Discrimination through Social Identities

Like Bardhan, Barbara Harriss-White (2004; McCartney & Harriss-White, 2000) also attempted to explain economic decline in India in the period of the developmental state. She does so with reference to the notion of intermediate classes as coined by Kalecki and applied by P.S. Jha in the Indian case. However, of more relevance here is her work on social structures of regulation and accumulation (Harriss-White, 2003, 2004, 2005).

Barbara Harriss-White's (2003, 2004, 2005) concern is with the way in which certain social and political institutions-gender, religion, caste and space-regulate labour participation in markets, shape accumulation strategies and contain tensions created by capitalist development. Class conflict is contained by the labouring poor's daily struggles for survival, by their mobile and fragmented nature and their non-class affiliations in a context of employment scarcity and insecurity (Harriss-White & Gooptu, 2001).

How do these identities suppress and exploit the majority in favour of capitalist domination and accumulation? In her various works, Harriss-White (2003, 2004, 2005; Harriss-White & Gooptu, 2001) has described how gender, caste, religion etc. regulate the majority of Indian labour operating in its informal economy and how capital and its agents deploy these to their benefit.

For example, to escape the exploitative and humiliating social relations in which village and agrarian class relations are embedded and to supplement their meagre wages, labourers migrate to urban areas for casual labour. But, this takes place along gender and age lines. Women largely remain in villages because responsibilities of domestic chores and own cultivation. Not only are they excluded from better waged off-farm work, but even in villages they are concentrated in least paid agricultural tasks. In the case of male labourers, local or migrants, debt relations and patronage

provide capital access to them and attached unpaid family labour. Poverty, food insecurity, exclusion from public and common resources and the political and social clout of the landed are some of the bases of labour bondage.

How does gender interact with class and caste? From the above example, it can be drawn that feminization of agriculture is distress induced and has not done away with the sexual division of labour. Where women can be found in non-agricultural employment, it is usually menial, casual, unpaid or very lowly paid in cash and/or kind and they are subject to harassment. These are more likely to be found in the case of scheduled castes, men and women.⁵ At the upper end of class hierarchy, women do not participate in productive employment. Marital alliances are arranged to access capital investment (dowry) and men to take over family businesses. Across the class spectrum, women are subordinate to men and lacking asset ownership.

Another way in which caste interacts with class is evident in the manner in which dominant classes create caste based associations which function as interest groups vis-à-vis the state. At the other end, intense competition for reserved jobs creates divisions among scheduled castes. In situations where employers and labourers are from similar caste background, the rhetoric of caste unity is used to repress labour. Labourers have resorted to caste based organisation to maintain control over certain types of jobs or organised in social movements or around political parties. This is one way in which these labourers assert their dignity, but at the same time, this resort to caste appeal undermines the struggle against class based exploitation. Religious principles and practices like unequal property inheritance laws and female seclusion also facilitate capital accumulation. As in the case of caste, religion based associations can circumscribe the flow of information and distribution of resources, create closed business networks etc.

Harris-White, through such examples drawn on her research, has argued that caste and class reinforce each other. Class contradictions are diluted and strategically contained. Sporadic labour action, either individual or collective, is ruthlessly repressed by state backed authorities. Such action, when it occurs, is directed against the direct

⁵ Scheduled Castes refers to the formerly untouchables.

oppressor on some issue. They are not broad based, sustained or against a common enemy. Economic stability, so central to capital's agenda, is ensured through these identities which are social and political constructions and this regulation of the economy has intensified under neoliberal globalisation as 'free' markets gained more and more ground at the expense of state which either cannot regulate or deliberately 'deregulates' under the neoliberal mandate (Harriss-white, 2003). At the same time, such facilitation of capital accumulation reinforces patriarchal relations, adversely affecting the welfare of women.

Harriss-White's is an important contribution. Her description of capital control over labour through class and non-class identities, as well as how labour exploitation and resistance is structured around these is well related to the objective of this thesis. Her works provide an invaluable insight into the conditions of labour. However, it is conceptually weak. Operating in a political economy framework, she provides a well researched and comprehensive analysis but it is not theoretically grounded. For example, while it is clear that class cannot be interpreted in narrow economic terms, no explanation is extended as to how it should be conceived when conducting research. But then her concern is not to provide a class schema. In comparison, Bernstein's framework not only provides theoretical framework and analytical categories to work with, he also provides a detailed picture of the changing nature of capitalism, key features of agrarian change and how rural/agricultural labour is implicated in these transformations. In other words, not only does he take into account the importance of non-class identities, but his area of focus is more suited to this thesis and also conceptually strong.

This section reviewed few analyses of rural social structure from a class perspective. It argued that Bernstein's framework is better than any other. In discussing the weaknesses of other formulations, this discussion underlined the relevance of Bernstein's position. Some of them agreed with Bernstein on certain grounds. For example, Patnaik, Beteille, Breman and Harriss-White all agree that rural change and class differentiation are to be understood in relation to the nature of capitalism. Their description of labour conditions attests to the relevance of Bernstein's agrarian question of labour in India. All these scholars emphasised on the interconnections between class and caste and gender, to varying extents. Bernstein also spoke of how

gender and caste shape class differentiation. Given the objective of this thesis is to study rural low caste female labour relations from a class perspective, the importance of how caste, gender and class mediate cannot be undermined. The following section briefly refers to the key features of the caste system. It also provides few pointers on how gender operates in rural India.

2.4.6. Caste and Gender in India

In much of the literature, caste and gender relations appear as interconnected factors determining the position of individuals in the (unequal) society. Here, I mention some features of the caste system and gender which operate to keep certain sections of a society subjugated. The former is discussed first.

The Government of India (GOI) has a three-fold caste classification: at the bottom are the scheduled castes (SCs) and scheduled tribes (STs) who have been so categorised on the basis of their specific features. SCs are the former untouchables, the historical victims of social and economic injustices perpetrated by a hierarchical caste system. STs refers to communities so classified by the GOI on account of their economic backwardness, unique cultural traits and geographical and social separation from the mainstream Indian society. Classes, other than SCs, STs and General category, with low levels of social, economic and educational development are classified as Other Backward Classes (OBC). All others are lumped in the General category, at the top.

While the idea of caste⁶ is widely debated, two things are commonly agreed: that it is premised on a notion of inequality (Srinivas, 1966, 1989; Fuchs, 1981; Mandelbaum, 1972) and secondly, caste identity is bound to be contested for several reasons-India's regional diversity, political use of caste by colonial power in pre-independence India, significance of caste in the electoral arena and in various social movements, and finally because of the political and economic implications that follow from one's caste identity (Srinivas, 1957, 1966; Mendelsohn & Vicziany, 1996; Beteille, 1997; Dirks, 2002). Moreover, though in recent years the focus on untouchability may have been

⁶ According to Beteille (1966) castes are found in Hindus, Muslims and Christians. Here the discussion has focussed on the Hindus.

displaced by emphasis on the poverty of scheduled castes, in reality, this shift is just symbolic (Dilege, 1997; Mendelsohn & Vicziany, 1996).

Srinivas (1966, 1989) defined caste (or *jati*)⁷ as a hereditary identity, applied to an endogamous group of people, engaged in specific occupations associated with their position in a hierarchical society. Position in the caste hierarchy depended on notions of purity-pollution, on regional features, linguistic affiliations or it could be due to differing principles. Affluence, asset ownership, political and economic power were also important determinants. Castes are internally divided.

At the top of the caste hierarchy are 'dominant castes' (Srinivas, 1987). They may or may not be a numerical majority in a village, but are large landowners and are politically and economically influential. They are most likely from higher castes. Fuchs (1981) identified those at the bottom of the caste hierarchy as scheduled castes (former untouchables). The historical practise of untouchability is associated with their poverty, low educational standards and discrimination in daily life (Fuchs, 1981; Mendelsohn & Vicziany, 1996). It is this which distinguishes them from the other poor.

Based on this caste hierarchy was a division of labour (Mandelbaum, 1972; Srinivas, 1987). Depending on their caste position, various castes were assigned occupations. This traditional division of labour regulated economic and social relations in the village. This was called the *jajmani* system. Along these lines, patron (usually upper castes) client (usually lower castes and service providers) relations also developed. Though considerably weakened by capitalist developments, the *jajmani* system was seen as a convenient way of securing labour or employment, as a source of credit and securing other services as and when required. Mendelsohn & Vicziany (1996) noted that scheduled castes mostly worked as agricultural labourers in addition to providing their traditional service. With capitalist penetration of agriculture and its declining capacity to absorb labour, these agricultural labourers had to resort to other non-agricultural casual wage labour in urban areas.

⁷ Srinivas (1966, 1987) has extended a *jati* and a *varna* interpretation of caste and suggested that the former understanding is more popular. Also see, Mendelsohn & Vicziany (1996, pp. 68-69).

There are divergences between an understanding of caste at a conceptual level and caste as seen in practice on ground (Srinivas, 1966; Mandelbaum, 1972). According to Deliege (1997), this ambiguity arises because government classification of scheduled caste does not neatly fit with sociological realities existing on ground. To put it simply, there are degrees of untouchability. Some castes are less clean than others or are permanently 'polluted'. However, these castes are not rigidly separated (Mandelbaum, 1972). According to Deliege (1997), nature and conditions of castes may vary from village to village which makes a uniform characterisation difficult. But more than this, the decisive point in being classified as a scheduled caste or a touchable low caste is whether a particular caste was historically engaged in slave or bonded work and whether it is served by other lower castes.

In comparison to caste, the issue of gender has not been as politically charged. In an autobiographical essay, Ilaiah (2005) describes how caste and gender ideologies and life style were inculcated in children from a young age. The very process of socialisation serves to create a caste based and gendered consciousness, they become a way of life, a natural order of things while in reality they are used to control and marginalise women. For instance, sexual division of labour is perceived and accepted as a traditional order, rather than as stabilising and legitimising a form of structural inequality (Beneria & Sen, 1997). If this is the case then, female agrarian labour relations, determined as they are by patronage and familial ties, by caste position and gender ideologies, can be said to subsidise (male?) capitalist accumulation. How does the ideology of gender intersect with capitalist relations?

Srinivas (1989) stressed on a straightforward correlation between caste and class vis-à-vis gender i.e. upper caste women lived a secluded life bearing domestic and reproductive responsibilities, whereas, low caste women, in addition to these responsibilities, performed wage labour which could bring them in direct contact with men. Imitation of upper caste practises in the case of upwardly mobile lower castes was also associated with female exclusion and stringent observation of rituals and traditions (Srinivas, 1977). More recently, this caste-class overlap with adverse consequences for women has also been documented in the case of Kanbis and Halpatis in Gujarat (Ebrahim, 2000). Even within the households, the gender

hierarchy operated along the lines of age with the eldest female member commanding the most authority (Ramamurthy, 1994).

Agricultural modernisation is associated with intensified female participation in own cultivation and in wage labour to save labour costs and to provide for the household in the face of male out migration and irregular remittances. This has had some positive outcome in terms of increasing female visibility and mobility, but these are distress induced. As women are perceived as dependents, their work and income is seen as supplementary to that of the male breadwinner. Their labour in own cultivation and livestock rearing is invisible and rendered unimportant. Such gendering of roles, underlines female labour's exploitation (Mazumdar, et al., 1992). Importantly, Ilaiah (2005) noted that though gendered division of labour is found across the caste spectrum, it is less rigid and oppressive among the scheduled castes than in the upper castes. For instance, scheduled caste women were perceived as productive agents, they openly retaliated against domestic agents, were involved in independent social relations etc.

Dube (1996) highlighted the role of gender in reinforcing caste hierarchies. Men migrate to take up new and relatively better paid work for reasons such as low wages, inadequate employment in traditional occupation or agriculture or because of the stigma attached with their traditional occupations. Women, on the other hand, have had to continue with traditional occupations to provide for the household and to maintain socio-economic relations in the village. Notions of purity, family dignity and honour are strictly tied to a woman's behaviour and observation of cultural practices and marital alliances are arranged to maintain these. Violation of traditions invites harsh punishments in the case of women but not men.

A logical question that follows from this note on caste and gender is if this common experience of exploitation and subordination on the part of the scheduled castes and women, overcome their internal differences and lead to any action against their oppressors. Does caste, class or gender form the basis of such action? In other words, if capitalism has incorporated and structured various social differences to serve its purposes, has there been any viable challenge to this from the labouring classes? What

form does this rural political expression take? The following section investigates these.

2.5. Rural Political Expression

Bernstein's framework does not deal with this per se, though he refers to struggles for land, better wages and other issues of 'agrarian politics' more generally (Bernstein, 2001, 2004; Bernstein & Byres, 2001). In Marx, class contradictions ultimately culminate in a revolution leading to progressive change. However, so far, it emerges from this chapter that petty commodity producers are greatly differentiated. Class interests among them and between petty commodity producers and other rural classes are also bound to be divisive and contradictory, unlike in the case of Marx's working class. Capitalist exploitation is also differentially experienced by men and women and by upper castes, other castes and scheduled castes. If their interface with structural constraints is varied, how are seemingly common interests i.e. resisting domination and oppression articulated? This section looks at some of the ways in which this has been achieved.

Eric Wolf (1969) highlighted the role of the peasantry in effecting structural change. The background to his 'peasant wars' was the spread of capitalism and how it resulted in the economic and social alienation of various sections of the population. This paved the possibility of broad based class alliances as seen in the case of the emerging Chinese working class, the peasantry and the students against the capitalist upheavals. Wolf does not undermine the differentiated nature and interests of the peasantry classes. Rather, the coming together of diverse interests at specific historical points, for purposes of political action, has to be explained with reference to local or regional power matrices, social configurations and external influence.

Hobsbawm (1973), on the other hand, strongly discounted the possibility of peasant revolts occurring on a grand-scale as in the case of Wolf. He also wrote in the context of traditional or transitional societies. According to him, peasant rebellions are mostly local or regional in character. Though, like Wolf, Hobsbawm too considered external influence an important factor in transforming small-scale peasant action into a broader movement. However, this singular and broad based peasant political action was

nothing but a temporary agglomeration of small peasant movements. At the same time, Hobsbawm does not deny the possibility of such action wielding considerable influence, depending upon their physical proximity to the capital state. An internalised sense of backwardness and demands of the agricultural production cycle are major limitations on the political potential of the peasantry. Hobsbawm argued that nonetheless this should not be equated with powerlessness because it might be a deliberate front behind which peasants seek to maximise benefits. What was more crucial in interpreting peasant inaction or action was how peasants related to local or national power structures.

As with Wolf and Hobsbawm, Alavi (1973) too was concerned with understanding the context of the peasantry's political response. Drawing on empirical work in Punjab (Pakistan), Alavi argued that peasant action had to be understood in relation to the wider socio-economic structures that peasants are embedded in. She identified three such structures. The first referred to the patron-client relationship between the landlords and the sharecroppers and labourers. Both, sharecroppers and labourers are dependent on the landlord for wage labour. Middle peasants either hire seasonal labour or work for others but to a much lesser extent. The second structure was that of kinship. Kinship ties were the strongest among the middle peasants and weakest among the sharecroppers and labourers as a landlord's authority extended into their private lives. Kinship ties were weak among the landlords as each sought to outdo the other in political and economic power. The third was the political structure. Landlords served as middlemen for villagers vis-à-vis government structures and the government, in turn, sought inroads into local power structures through landlords. How do these relationships bear on the possibility of political action by peasants? In case of sharecroppers and labourers, economic dependence on rival landlords prevented kinship solidarity among them which could be an important factor in political mobilization. Middle peasants share strong solidarity links and could organise against landlords with the help of political parties or peasant unions. In the case of landlords, kinship did not enable class solidarity. Rather, kinship networks served as political base.

In the latter half of the twentieth century, James Scott's (1985, 1986) 'weapons of the weak' found much resonance in micro-level empirical works and still continues to. As

such, it is critically looked at here. Weapons of the weak referred to routine ways in which the exploited such as the peasantry sought to minimise their oppression. For instance, foot-dragging, slander, feigned ignorance, pretensions, slander etc. These are deliberate actions that do not require collective coordination. Importantly, they extend anonymity to their users as direct confrontation is absent. They are easily accessible and possible in a context where the peasantry is an increasingly diverse, geographically dispersed and unorganised category. Though symbolic in nature, they can influence policy options of the state. For a recent application of this formulation see Kerkvliet (2009).

The reasons that prevent or diffuse overt class conflicts, as seen in the previous section, offer one explanation as to why everyday forms of peasant resistance come across as the most viable expression of class conflict. However, Scott's formulation has been criticised for various reasons. Hart (1991) criticised Scott for not taking into account the gendered nature of labour arrangements. Drawing on her fieldwork in Malaysia, she argued that patron-client relations constrained actions of male labour who cultivated these ties for various reasons. On the other hand, political marginalisation of women, allowed female labour to comparatively openly challenge oppressive structures. White (1986) criticised Scott's approach for undermining the socio-economic differentiation between and within peasant households and for not adequately elaborating on what/who was being resisted and the effectiveness of the resistance (White, 1986). Turton (1986) also criticised Scott for not focussing on the oppressor but portraying only one side of the class relation. Walker (2008) criticised Scott for a weak and conservative portrayal of the peasantry.

The 1980s were also witness to collective political action as encapsulated in the farmers' movements in India. They were representative of broad level rural political agitation or agrarian conflict. In a volume edited by Brass (1994), it is evident that farmers' movements emerged and mobilised around issues of neoliberal economic policies, crisis of green revolution and underdevelopment of India. Their actions were shaped by their regional specificities. The class composition of these movements was also much debated. The more common view though was they represented the interests of surplus producing farmers at a crucial time of capitalist development in agriculture, where some accumulated to the exclusion of others. Not only did farmers' movements

not represent the interests of rural labourers, but they also fanned caste consciousness because the landlord-peasant divide overlapped upper caste-scheduled caste divide.

The issues of class, caste and gender have figured prominently in labour struggles which themselves are highly diverse in terms of their mobilization, objectives, the level at which they take place, the nature of struggle etc. What is common to most of them is their local or regional nature, labourers featured as principal actors and these agitations derived from capitalist developments, particularly in agriculture, which directly affected them. Two of the early examples come from Maharashtra: that of the Shahada movement in Maharashtra (Mies, 1976) and the successful organised militant action on the part women agricultural workers for employment and against price rise (urban women mostly) in the early 1970s (Omvedt, 1978). More recently, Tanner's (1995) study of labour union participation in rural Andhra Pradesh highlighted that the political response of labourers is conditioned by various factors such as the local history of confrontation, the degree of caste solidarity and economic differentiation within castes, personal motivations, risk perception etc. Tanner also stressed on the greater possibility of success of female agitation which draws on social and work based relations and is conditioned by ideological factors. On the other hand, Jeffery and Jeffery (1996) proposed a different understanding of resistance by women. They argue that in the case of women, resistance cannot be understood simply as visible collective action. It has to be perceived as women's agency and the covert ways in which they use political dynamics, social structures and power relations to negotiate spaces for themselves. A narrow definition of resistance risks stereotyping women as passive victims of oppressive structures.

There are other types of 'agrarian politics' such as those represented by transnational agrarian movements (for example see, Borras, et al., 2008) or in the Indian context, the role of political parties with an overwhelming scheduled caste and/or agricultural support base (for example see, Lerche, 1999). However, it is beyond the scope of this chapter to cover all types, though the latter would briefly be referred to in the next chapter. Despite this variety of ways in which the agrarian classes can politically express themselves, in recent years the terrain of Alavi, Scott, and local or regional based sporadic, dispersed and temporary issue based labour struggles are more common, as one would assume in the context of Bernstein's agrarian question of

labour. These are not class struggles as traditionally understood in a Marxian sense. They do, however, reflect the contemporary ground realities of fragmented classes of labour, embedded in particularistic identities and structures of power, and negotiating between class in itself and class for itself action.

In sum, this chapter has laid out the theoretical reference points for this thesis. The theoretical abstractions and broad generalisations presented in this chapter are located in the Indian context in the following chapter.

Chapter 3

Agrarian Neoliberalism and Rural Labour: The Case of India and UP

The primary concern of this chapter is to see how neoliberal developments in Indian agriculture have impacted classes of labour generally and women from low caste labouring households especially. This is analysed at two levels: India and UP. Though the approach is that of a class analysis, it is admittedly a one sided analysis i.e. class is a social relation with capital and labour on two ends, and only the labour side of this relationship is studied.

Continuing with an agrarian political economy approach, the first section begins with the application of Bernstein's position in India as done by Lerche (2008, 2011) and how this may help to understand the agrarian question of labour in India, particularly in context of the recent agrarian crisis. To do this, the section then extends a summary of the neoliberal policies as applied to Indian agriculture. It then proceeds to describe the agrarian crisis from a political economy perspective. Of particular concern here are the ways in which agrarian neoliberalism influenced labour that was primarily dependent on agriculture for its reproduction. In the second section, the focus shifts to agriculture in UP. A historical examination of changing agrarian relations is undertaken.

At the end of first two sections, we will be familiar with the crisis in the agricultural sector (at India and UP level) which traditionally constituted the terrain of rural labour, have a basic understanding of how this influenced small farmers and labouring households and agree with the relevance of Bernstein's position in the Indian context. Hereafter, the attention shifts to the landscape of rural low caste female labour relations and labour struggles. These form the subjects of the third and fourth sections respectively. In so doing, these sections will simultaneously consider available evidence from different regions of the country and UP, while highlighting the gaps in our knowledge on these themes in the context of UP.

3.1. Bernstein's Agrarian Question of Capital and Labour: The Indian Case

A scrutiny of Bernstein's theorisation in Indian context is interesting given that in recent years India has shown overall good growth rates while its agricultural growth has declined (Chandrasekhar, 2007) and agriculture is said to be in a crisis situation for the past decade. It is also challenging to generalize given inter-regional and intra-regional disparities in India (Lerche 2008, 2011).

Lerche (2008) highlights two grounds for Bernstein's assertion that the agrarian question of capital has been bypassed or resolved. First, generalised petty commodity production within capitalist social relations already existed at the time of decolonization. Second, not only neoliberal globalisation has opened up new sources of funding industrialisation (doing away with dependency on agrarian surplus), but also, the state's power to redirect agrarian surplus is much constrained under this regime. Moreover, contrary to the classic agrarian transition's assumption, linkages between the agricultural and industrial sectors are considerably weakened. This is seen in the Indian growth trajectory of high growth rates in recent years, while agriculture is in a state of crisis. On these fronts, Lerche agrees with Bernstein. On the agrarian question of labour also, Lerche agrees that broad based redistributive land reforms are difficult to achieve. The only difference is that while Bernstein does not consider the possibility of redistributive land reforms, Lerche thinks it is possible, but highly unlikely. Lerche also believes that even if land reforms were to occur, unless substantive, the extent to which they can benefit rural labour is debatable. He agrees with Bernstein that given the predominance of capitalist relations of production and reproduction, rural labour is best understood vis-à-vis capital and not agriculture.

However, the establishment of the capitalist mode of production and declined dependency on agricultural accumulation does not undermine the importance of studying the diverse processes of capitalist agrarian transformation in India, for instance, a class based analysis of the creation and appropriation of surplus (Lerche, 2008). Lerche (2011) believes that capitalist agrarian transformation in India is uneven, slow and in accordance with Bernstein's framework i.e. the nature of India's capitalist growth indicates that the agrarian question of capital has been bypassed

without a classical resolution. On the other hand, there are others like Byres (2003) who do not agree with Bernstein. In the case of Arunachal Pradesh, Harriss-White (2009) argues that capitalist developments outside agriculture and the state's integration with the global economy in this sense, conforms to Bernstein's assertion that the agrarian question of capital has been bypassed. At the same time, the pace of capitalist agrarian transformation is very slow and it still reflects pre-capitalist social relations. However, she also admits that reproduction outside market is increasingly becoming difficult. In West Bengal, she shows a different picture, that of agrarian accumulation being diverted into related activities with benefits for overall development (Harriss-White, 2008; Lerche, 2011).

The following sub-section refers to agrarian neoliberalism and the distress in the agrarian sector in recent years in India and its implications for hitherto rural and agrarian labour. This will bring out the analytical strengths and utility of using Bernstein's framework to conceptualise labouring classes in India, irrespective of the theoretical debates on the extent and nature of capitalist agrarian transformation in India as mentioned above.

3.1.1. Neoliberal Agricultural Development and the Agrarian Crisis

In the context of India, the shift to neoliberalism was becoming evident from the mid 1980s (McCartney, 2009; Kohli, 2006a). The 1991 balance of payment crisis was the immediate trigger for the adoption of stabilisation and adjustment reform strategy—a primary condition in exchange for the loan extended by the Bretton Woods Institutions. Whether or not this was essential and represented a sharp 'break' from previous policies and what class interests this reform strategy represented are beyond the scope of this chapter (for example, Chandrasekhar & Ghosh, 2002; Kohli, 2006b). What is more pertinent here is the policy change this initiated.

Two main components of neoliberal policy, as implemented in India, are fiscal contraction and trade liberalisation. At the level of the agricultural sector, this involved several measures:

- (i) Government expenditure on rural infrastructure like power, irrigation and transport facilities, on seed and fertilizer subsidies and on extension and support services was drastically cut.
- (ii) Easily accessible rural credit was undermined with financial liberalisation.
- (iii) Scope of the public distribution system reduced significantly.
- (iv) Revision of land ceilings.
- (v) Trade liberalisation involved dismantling of various import and export controls and subsidies regarding many agricultural commodities, promotion of foreign investment in inputs like seeds and domestic prices were brought in line with international market prices.
- (vi) The increasing dominance of multinational agri-businesses in input markets, in agrarian research and through patenting of agricultural products and other traditional method and practices.

(Source: Ramachandran and Rawal, 2010; Chandrasekhar & Ghosh, 2002; Ghosh, 2005; Mooij, 2005; Reddy & Mishra, 2009).

How did agriculture fare in this policy environment? India's regional diversity makes it difficult to extend a single answer. Nonetheless, over the past decade, academics and government reports have indicated that the agricultural sector and significant sections of Indian farmers are facing distress conditions (For example, GOI, 2007; NCEUS 2007, 2008; Patnaik, 2003; Ramachandran & Rawal, 2010; Chandrasekhar & Ghosh, 2002). The following outlines some aspects of this agrarian crisis.

There are three limitations to the examination presented subsequently. First, this outline of the sectoral crisis is not exhaustive but indicative of major issues and impacts. Complex details are deliberately not probed here, rather, this summary is used as an insight into the conditions of labour and how this links to Bernstein's agrarian question of labour (for a detailed review of nature and trajectory of agricultural growth see Chand, et al., 2007; Bhalla & Singh, 2009). Second, the focus is on small and marginal farmers and agricultural labourers, though this is not to deny that other agrarian classes are not influenced. Third, gender and caste concerns are underscored as much as possible, though these are not primary subjects of study in much of the relevant literature.

3.1.2. Dimensions of India's Agrarian Crisis and Rural Labour⁸

The agrarian crisis in India is underscored by class, caste and gender dynamics. This has been clearly established by two recent reports of the NCEUS set up by the government. Indian agriculture is numerically dominated by small and marginal farmers to the extent of 80 percent (NCEUS, 2008).⁹ These together with the agricultural labourers are most adversely affected by the agrarian crisis (NCEUS, 2007, 2008).¹⁰ Majority of these are scheduled castes or scheduled tribes and very poor (NCEUS 2007, 2008, also see Sengupta, et al., 2008). In fact, their low social status has been recognised as one of the major obstacle in their progress, even in cases where they own some land (NCEUS 2007, 2008). While male labour shows economic diversification out of agriculture, female labour continues to be concentrated in agriculture due to socio-cultural restrictions and lack of new employment opportunities (NCEUS, 2007).

These reports do not undertake a systematic critique of agrarian neoliberalism in their examination of the current agricultural situation, though occasional reference is made to constraints or the growth pattern not being exclusive. Structural sources of inequality and patriarchal ideology leading to the marginalisation and concentration of female labour are not explored convincingly. This section attempts a more comprehensive analysis based on secondary sources. Distress conditions can be found in the case of small and marginal farmers across regions, irrespective of the region's level of agricultural development (Singh, 2005; also see Chand, et al., 2007). However, much of the evidence available is clustered around certain states like Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.

Distress conditions in agriculture have to be understood with reference to two developments. First, the structure of Indian growth since 1991 which has been

⁸ Though it is accepted that it is no longer analytically relevant to conceive labour as just rural or agrarian and similarly it is not useful to talk of peasants, these terms are used here because this is how they have been represented in the literature. Regarding labour, it is largely described as rural and agrarian. Indian left-oriented scholars, who have mainly worked in the agrarian political economy tradition and whose work is extensively used here, believe in the validity of a differentiated Indian peasant class.

⁹ For NCEUS (2008) marginal farmers are defined as owning landholdings of size 0.01-1.00 hectare (ha) and small farmers owning land between 1.01-2.00 ha.

¹⁰ NSSO (2001) defines agricultural labour as one engaged in any number of agricultural activities like farming, livestock rearing etc. as a hired labourer or on an exchange basis and is paid in cash and/or kind.

reasonably high in recent years, but on the other hand, the growing divergence between sectoral shares in this growth and their employment share. Notably, the share of agriculture in GDP declined from 30 percent in 1990-91 to 14.5 percent in 2010-11, while more than half of Indians presently depend on agriculture for their livelihoods (GOI, n.d.; see also RBI, 2008; GOI, 2007). Between 1994/95 and 2004/05, annual agricultural growth rate was at an all time low of 0.6 percent (Chandrasekhar, 2007). The second development relates to changes in agriculture which have been underway since prior to the 1990s (though maybe accentuated in the post 1990s period). For instance, changes in technology, cultivation practices, accumulation strategies, fragmentation of landholdings which have had grave implications for agrarian labour in terms of labour demand and returns from agriculture. In other words, the present agrarian crisis is not just a direct consequence of the reforms process but a culmination of other long-term structural/institutional factors as well.

Increased poverty, reduced employment and food security are some of the major consequences of the neoliberal policy regime at the national and global level (Patnaik 2003a, 2003b, 2004; Ghosh, 2005). Subjecting government figures to a critical scrutiny, Patnaik (2003a) asserts that during the 1990s the government amassed huge foodstock holdings without any increase in per capita foodgrain output. This was because of the low purchasing power of the rural population and this, for her, is the root cause of the agrarian crisis. This income deflation is directly derived from roll-back of public expenditure on agriculture and rural development as imposed by the Fund-Bank consortium on Indian government. Decline in government sponsored rural employment programmes has had adverse affects for rural poverty and purchasing power. Employment was also influenced by changing land use and cropping patterns from foodgrains to less labour intensive non-traditional expensive cash crops for exports. Decline in government subsidies, extension facilities and proliferation of inferior quality inputs in the market negatively impacted agricultural production (Patnaik, 2003b).

The volatility of international market prices has tremendously increased cultivation risks. Patnaik (2003a) attributes falling prices of certain agricultural commodities to a crisis of global capitalism and in this structural context. A grave manifestation of the

crisis has been the large number of farmers' suicides across India. Patnaik (2003b, 2004) explains this with reference to cotton growers in Andhra Pradesh, northern Karnataka, Punjab and Maharashtra. Encouraged by high cotton prices in the early 1990s, many farmers secured credit from private sources to invest in cotton cultivation. In the absence of subsidies, input cost structure increased. Farmers depended on private credit involving exploitative socio-economic relations. Government expenditure on provisioning cheap rural credit had decreased as a part of agrarian neoliberalism. Absence of proper information and advice on cotton cultivation and use of poor quality seeds and pesticides damaged the crop. On top of this, prices for cotton declined from the mid 1990s. In the face of indebtedness and food insecurity, a large number of farmers committed suicides. Food insecurity was also exacerbated by the much reduced coverage of the PDS from the late 1990s (Patnaik, 2003b).

Land alienation is yet another consequence of the implementation of the neoliberal agenda. In states like Maharashtra and Karnataka land ceiling laws have been revised to enable multinational agri-businesses acquire agricultural land (Patnaik, 2003b; Ramachandran, 2011).

As argued by Patnaik (2004), the duplicity of actors pushing neoliberalism in developing countries is revealed when one considers the huge subsidies that countries like USA and Japan give to their farmers. She strongly argues for institutional solutions such as extension of security to tenants, land redistribution and a democratic political support as seen in the case of West Bengal (Patnaik, 2003b).

In view of the increasing cost of cultivation, Singh (2005) has described the crisis in a traditionally high productivity state like Punjab as one of viability and increasing capital cost (tractors, electric motors and pumps or the cost of renting these) vis-à-vis declining income from agriculture (Singh, 2009). Much like Patnaik, he highlights the problems and inherent risks in commercial contract farming in a context of liberalised trade. In Punjab, apart from farmers' suicides, one of the most detrimental consequences is that of land alienation in the guise of reverse tenancy. As a result of their vulnerable position due to unviability of farming in the face of increased production costs and risks, the spectre of depressed domestic prices due to availability

of cheaper imports and control of the market by few private actors, small and marginal farmers have increasingly leased out their land to medium and rich farmers. Additionally, Singh (2005) highlighted that even where small farmers have managed to move into non-traditional agriculture, returns have been very low because of small output and high investment structure. In the present structural context, a lot depends on having knowledge of market operations and backward and forward linkages-the very things made difficult in the present context of state roll-back and 'free' markets. What complicates matters further is that heightened differentiation among caste and classes, has fragmented agrarian classes and society in general, making political action difficult (Jodhka, 2006). Suri (2006) has presented a somewhat similar argument: in India, liberalisation has undoubtedly contributed to agrarian distress, but the problem also lies in the nature of Indian polity. He argues that a big problem is the marginalisation of farmers discourse from Indian politics as reflected in the decline of farmers' movements and decentring of peasant related issues from political parties and the disjuncture between farmers' interests and India's determined pursuit of industrial growth. Like Jodhka, Suri also makes the point that social and economic fissures among farmers have made consistent country based organisation difficult.

Ghosh's (2005) analysis of the agrarian and more generally, rural distress, is similar to that of Patnaik's. Ghosh's evidence also draws on Andhra Pradesh and highlights the correlation between neoliberal policies, reduced government spending and the abysmal situation of farmers. In addition, she underscores several other factors which abetted and accentuated the crisis. Reliance on informal credit was absolute in the case of tenants, female farmers and others who did not own land in their own names. Shift to cultivation of crops that required more water led to over-use of ground water, in a situation where farmers were already bearing the burden of reduced public irrigation sources, increased power tariffs and absence of informed and correct advice from trained extension workers. Privatisation was another factor. Debt was also incurred to meet the high costs of increasingly privatised health and education facilities. Decline or closure of small rural industrial units such as handlooms was a further squeeze on employment opportunities (also see Patnaik, 2003b), as also the reduced profit margins in dairy and livestock rearing. Closure, deliberate ruin or privatisation of public institutions dealing in irrigation, seeds, allied industries or

sugar cooperatives which mediated farmers' access to market also added to the plight of farmers.

The differentiated impact of agrarian distress is highlighted by Ramachandran (2011). Based on village surveys in various states, he found that under trade liberalisation, incomes of peasant households in AP, UP, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and MP were marginal, while that of big capitalist and rich peasants were significant. The latter could benefit from economies of scale as they owned most land and control input costs. They also benefited from owning other assets like agricultural machinery which poor peasants had to rent at high costs. Among the middle and poor peasants, scheduled castes are the worst off. Athreya (2009) has also noted that the implications of neoliberal policies for the lower castes and women are likely to be harsher. Though formal credit provision picked up from the early 2000s, this was largely cornered by rich classes and corporate interests (Ramakumar & Chavan 2007 cited in Ramachandran, 2011, p.74). According to Ramachandran (2011), under financial liberalisation, there has been a proliferation of micro-credit societies but these also charge high interest rates and the 'beneficiaries' often use them for some immediate requirement and non-productive purposes. As poor peasants are overall buyers of food, they are the most affected by increases in food prices.

Based on their village surveys in AP, UP, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and MP, Ramachandran & Rawal (2010) confirm that land inequalities have increased over the past forty years and government spending on rural credit and infrastructure sharply declined. On the issue of rural employment, their position is similar to that of Patnaik and Ghosh. They stress on the need for government driven employment schemes such as MGNREGA for rural development and poverty alleviation.¹¹ However, MGNREGA has not been an unqualified success. For example, the nature of work and mode of payment puts women at a disadvantage since they cannot do as much work as men (Karat 2008 cited in Ramachandran & Rawal, 2010, p.81), allegations of corruption, delayed wage payment, procedural difficulties etc. (Dreze & Khera 2009 cited in Ramachandran & Rawal, 2010, p.81; also see Athreya, 2009).

¹¹ A GOI initiative, flagged off in 2005-06, guaranteeing a hundred days of work per rural household that demands it. Where it is unable to give work, it provides for unemployment benefit. It also makes special provision for women. (See <http://nrega.nic.in/rajaswa.pdf> for details).

Ramachandran et al.'s (2010) review of three villages in AP and Reddy & Mishra's (2009) edited volume analysing the nature of neoliberal agrarian development and causes of farmers' suicides in Maharashtra, Karnataka, AP, Kerala and Punjab and also provide similar evidence on the causes and impact of agrarian distress as described in the above paragraphs. Additionally, they highlight some other important implications. The case studies presented in Reddy & Mishra's (2009) edited volume highlight that regional specificities underscore agrarian crisis, for example, the agro-climatic zones, land structure, availability of alternate employment in close proximity and importantly, divergence in the nature and growth patterns within states. These field based case studies, as well as Ramachandran et al.'s (2010) villages surveys highlight few implications not mentioned so far.

They argue, for instance, the crisis should not only be understood as an economic or livelihood crisis. It has grave social implications as well. Mishra's (2009) case study shows that in Maharashtra, crop failures and distress induced asset loss or sale is associated with humiliation and inability to fulfil family responsibilities which drive men to commit suicide. In the context of Kerala, Nair & Menon (2009) mention the various ways in which the affected farming households cope with distress conditions including cutbacks in farm investment, reduced food intake, migration etc. Mishra (2009) and Galab et al. (2009) point out that the political make up of a region is crucial because presence of politically dominant castes could prompt political intervention at crucial junctures.

Ramachandran et al. (2010) point out the increase in tenancy (including reverse tenancy) and in AP over the last thirty years. Landowner-tenant relations have become increasingly exploitative. On the one hand, rich peasants lease in land from poor peasants for a fixed cash rent and cultivated cash crops. On the other hand, poor peasants leased in land to mainly cultivate food crops and paid part of the produce as rent. In the latter case, all investments were made by the tenant (mainly dalits) who could hardly break-even because even though yields increased, so did the cultivation cost. From their surveys, Ramachandran et al. (2010) concluded that scheduled castes and tribes are disproportionately represented at the bottom of the rural class hierarchy and broadly, most of them are engaged in some agricultural or related activity. Very

low incomes and irregularity of agricultural employment, more so in distress conditions, has led to many of these men to migrate. However, women remain in the village and in agricultural work. Gender wage gap is prominent. Not only is debt higher in poor peasants who are mostly SCs/STs, but they incurred debt from informal sources mostly used for productive and non-productive purposes.

Overall, three important points emerge from this discussion on causes and implications of agrarian distress in India. First, the neoliberal reforms are directly related to the present agrarian distress. Household level factors like large families and long-term trends like marginalisation of landholdings also did not help. Second, the implications of the crisis are mediated through class, caste and gender (much under researched in most of the literature). Small and marginal farmers and labourers have borne the crisis burden and they are more likely to be SC/STs. Third, the crisis is evident even in parts of otherwise rich states like Maharashtra and AP. This implies intra-regional specificities that underpin distress conditions and that the economic growth is not dependent on an agrarian surplus. What can also be inferred from the above discussion is the differentiation within the 'peasantry', though this has not been adequately conceptualised in the works referred to here. Ramachandran et al. (2010) and Reddy & Mishra (2009) do this to some extent, but not convincingly (for a critical review see Lerche, 2011).

These conclusions are in line with Bernstein's framework which located the agrarian question of labour in relation to neoliberal capitalism as manifested in contemporary globalisation and defined the agrarian question of labour as a crisis of reproduction for labour. Conditions of labour are better explained and understood in relation to capital. It can also be drawn from the case studies referred to in this section that marginal and small and marginal farmers and agricultural labourers are engaged in small-scale commercial agriculture to varying extents and this is combined with a variety of wage labour. This conforms to Bernstein's assertion on the pervasiveness of commodification, that capitalist social relations characterise the countryside and that there is commodification of subsistence. While there is acknowledgment of a differentiated peasantry and of shifting (worsening) economic status, this process is not theorised and here Bernstein's position on differentiation in petty commodity

production is particularly enabling. It also follows from above that peasantry is better understood as petty commodity producers.

Before moving on to the agrarian structure of UP, it is to be noted that a major drawback in the evidence presented above is the lack of detailed observation on gender specifically and caste generally. Gender and caste are social structures that underscore the implications of such crises and shocks. These have been posited as important structures deployed to recruit and control labour or perceived as analytical categories shaping processes of differentiation as seen in the works of Harriss-White and Bernstein respectively. However, in much of the literature on agrarian distress, gender and caste are not adequately conceptualised as decisive factors influencing the consequences of distress. For instance, how one's caste and gender might limit or condition one's access to common resources, institutional credit, non-agricultural work etc.—which otherwise may have helped to mitigate the impact of the agrarian crisis felt by one household. Rather, gender and caste are perceived in consequential terms. For instance, increased female wage labour participation due to distress induced male migration.

Moving on from the national level picture, below is a historical overview of agrarian structure and relations in UP. Against this framework rural labour in the state is understood.

3.2. Agrarian Structure and Relations: The Case of UP

A basic knowledge of agrarian developments in UP is essential to set the context for rural labour or labour originating from agriculture. This review is limited by several factors.

The state of UP is divided into four regions—western, eastern, central and Bundelkhand. But it is the east-west comparison that dominates the literature. On this, most of the existing studies are located in western UP. With the exception of few micro level field studies, recent changes in agrarian structure and relations in the east of the state have not been comprehensively captured. Central UP and Bundelkhand do not find independent studies focussing on them and in early works were discussed as

extensions of other regions of the state. Here, the agricultural history of the eastern part is considered in relation to that of west. One reason for this is the availability of secondary literature and second, this comparison captures the main agricultural development patterns in the state. This review is also constrained by the fact that evidence on agrarian distress in the state is rather patchy. Finally, most literature on UP does not extend a historical analysis of agrarian structure and relations with reference to gender. There is some evidence on gendered impacts of capitalist diffusion in agriculture vis-à-vis female labour (for example, Sharma, 1985) and this will be discussed in the section on female labour relations.

Historically, land has been the primary asset around which agrarian relations revolved. Brass (1980) and Hasan (1998) extend a historical analysis of agrarian change and rural class relations in UP. At independence, UP had a small number of large *zamindars* who had been politically and economically favoured by the British and therefore were already in a dominant position in rural India.¹² The main nationalist organ at that time, the Indian National Congress (INC) sought to build its support on the platform of the medium and small *zamindars* and the high caste tenants of the *zamindars*. For this purpose, the Congress rallied for tenancy reforms in the colonial era with partial success. As the undisputed rulers in post-independence India and in UP, the Congress enacted reforms to abolish the *zamindari* power hold and break up large holdings by imposing ceiling limits.¹³ However, these reforms fell far short of their mandates. While the *zamindar's* role in revenue collection was eliminated as were various tenancy rights and some large holdings were broken up, in actual reality the former *zamindars* managed to evade law and retain their land base. Therefore, land redistribution was little and inequalities in ownership persisted. Over the years, the economic and political position of these landowners has been further entrenched through land consolidation, the green revolution and *panchayati raj* institutions.¹⁴ Some middle castes who were tenants of *zamindars* who benefited.

¹² *Zamindars* referred to landlords. They were responsible for collecting revenue from villages for the state.

¹³ The *Zamindari* abolition Act of 1952 and Imposition of Ceilings on Land Holdings Act of 1960.

¹⁴ Under land consolidation, fragmented holdings were brought together into a continuous holding. The green revolution referred to increased capital and technological application in farming. *Panchayati raj* refers to rural local self-government.

Brass (1980) and Hasan (1998) agree that at the beginning of the 1970s, in both the eastern and western regions of the state, the numerically small upper castes like Brahmins, Bhumihars, Rajputs, Thakurs and few middle castes like the Ahirs and Kurmis owned most of the land. At the bottom end, lower castes were overwhelmingly agricultural labourers. Beyond this common caste-class overlap, there were significant regional disparities. Unlike the west, eastern UP had a disproportionately high number of small holdings, few medium holdings and a large number of agricultural labourers. The situation was the same in early 1980s (Hasan, 1998; Sharma & Poleman, 1994). One implication of this was the presence of extreme inequality in eastern UP where a small number of non-cultivating upper and middle castes controlled most land. In contrast, western UP had comparatively numerically significant cultivating caste-classes that controlled much more land, constraining class polarisation. It is clear that in the case of UP, economic and social inequality largely show a straightforward correlation and in fact, it had been argued very early on that land reforms were unlikely to extend social and economic equality (Neale, 1962). In subsequent years, this became a major basis for politicisation of various sections of rural classes. This will be mentioned briefly later in the chapter in the section on labour struggles.

The period between 1970s and 1990s saw few other changes in agrarian land relations in UP: redistribution of *gram sabha* land among the scheduled castes prevented absolute landlessness to some extent, inheritance laws accentuated fragmentation of holdings across the socio-economic spectrum, some scheduled castes and other backward classes purchased land in the market or leased in land from upper caste Hindus and Muslims (Srivastava, 1999).¹⁵ These factors have been associated with increasing rural class differentiation, class polarisation to varying extents and proletarianisation of the poor peasantry (Saith & Tankha, 1972; Subas, 1984). Between early 1980s and 2000, proportion of SCs among large landowners increased, but at the same time, they reflected a disproportionate share at the bottom of land hierarchy (Srivastava, 2007). In other words, slight improvement in the position of SCs was accompanied by greater differentiation among them. Overall though, upper

¹⁵ *Gram sabha* is the local elected body of the village/villages and is the foundational unit of the *pachayati raj*. The state governments through *gram sabhas* distributed wasteland, pastures and other village non-cultivated land among the SCs primarily (Srivastava, 1999). Regarding agricultural land inheritance In India, agricultural land is divided among successors.

castes maintained their hold at the top of the land hierarchy, while agricultural labourers were primarily SCs (Srivastava, 2007; Lerche, 1998).

As suggested by Hasan (1998) and Srivastava (1999), the different trajectories of agrarian change in east and west UP can, to a large extent, be explained in relation to the land structure in combination with other government sponsored policies extending rural infrastructure, credit, subsidies etc. Green revolution was first introduced in western UP in mid 1960s given its favourable agro-climatic conditions, land structure, infrastructural and resource base (particularly with respect to irrigation and electrification) and the industrious nature of its farmers. Resultantly, the western region reflected high agricultural growth till years later. Just as in the case of regional inequality, the gains accrued to economically better positioned farmers in western UP and an emerging surplus producing middle caste peasantry which in time became politically and economically dominant in the region (for an overview also see Lerche, 1998).

Economic and social change was slow and uneven in eastern U.P during the 1960s (for example, see Singh, 1970; Singh, 1976; Jetley, 1977). However, it is generally agreed that the situation in eastern UP began to change from the mid 1970s under government tutelage leading to the development of an irrigation network and adoption of green revolutions technologies and by the early 1980s, inter-regional disparities had narrowed (Sharma & Poleman, 1994; Srivastava, 1999). An important factor in this was the evolving class structure under the impact of changing cultivation practices, accumulations patterns and labour arrangements, particularly in the case of middle and rich peasants (Srivastava, 1999). Some of these aspects will be mentioned later in the chapter with reference to labour relations. Lerche and Jeffery (2003) point out a north-south divide in addition to the one between the east and west regions. According to their analysis (1961-91), the northern districts in west UP and central districts in east UP reflected higher agricultural growth than other districts. For example, in east UP, agricultural growth has been more pronounced in the north where capitalist agriculture pursuing small peasants are concentrated in contrast to the south-east where labourers are predominant (for example, Mirzapur, Allahabad, Banda).

At the same time, these developments in agriculture reflected another trend; decreasing labour requirements of agriculture due to several reasons: mechanisation displaced some labour, increased cultivation of sugarcane or shift to orchards that do not provide year round employment, miniaturisation of holdings, increased participation of owners in cultivation and greater availability of better paid and less exploitative non-agricultural employment. In the 1970s and 1980s, off-farm employment availability was a consequence of government's rural schemes and emergence of industrial, manufacturing and service activities in response to capitalist developments in agriculture (Sharma, 1994; Ruthven & Kumar, 2002). However, it has been suggested that these peaked by mid 1980s as public expenditure decreased or government sponsored work could only be accessed through patron-client relations and competition for local employment increased because of incoming migrant labour (Ruthven & Kumar, 2002). Logically then it would follow that marginal and small holders and agricultural labourers (predominant in the eastern region) would be adversely affected.

Though, in a vast and diverse state like UP, it is not possible to extend definite conclusions applicable to the entire state, the above tendencies and observations do provide a general understanding. However, UP continues to be predominantly an agrarian economy in terms of employment share. According to the Planning Commission of India (2007), more than 65 percent of the workforce is involved in agriculture, though agricultural growth was only 2.3 percent per year during the 1990s. Approximately 75 percent of its holdings are less than one hectare (GoUP, 2006). Both these reports recognise the need for higher public investment in agriculture, but emphasise on developing the private sector. They suggest elimination of subsidies to increase efficiency and promulgation of leasing laws to encourage long term contract farming under corporate tutelage. The state government's intention to allow large private actors to purchase directly from farmers is a further reflection of the continuing corporatisation of agriculture (Ghosh, 2007; Mahaprashasta & Ramakrishnan, 2011). More generally, underlying these policies is the failure of various governments to invest adequately in agricultural subsidies, rural credit, to provide supporting facilities and protection from the damaging consequences of corporatisation of agriculture occurring at various levels.

Unlike for some other states, comprehensive fieldwork based political economy analyses of the status of UP agriculture in recent years are not available (for example, what has been agriculture's role been in the state's recent economic growth (see the following paragraph), which agrarian classes have gained and which have been marginalised and why?). However, low agricultural growth rates, with continued concentration of the workforce in agriculture, do indicate that all is not well with the agricultural sector, as do evidence of farmers' suicide under debt burden (Verma, 2011). Small, marginal and even well-off farmers in western UP have been forced to sell their produce at very low prices (Tripathi, 2004). Here the problem is not of damaged crop or low output, but one of 'overproduction', lack of market, weak procurement efforts by the government and unremunerative prices (Tripathi, 2004).

At the same time, it should be noted that UP has registered annual average growth rate of 7.2 percent since about 2007, whereas, this was a mere 4.4 percent between the late 1990s and late 2000s (Nayyar, 2011). This makes for a complex picture. The causes and sources of this growth are not clear. One source attributes it to state expenditure on building a huge road network (Nayyar, 2011), though this type of investment is criticised too because it benefits corporate interests by acquiring farmers' land and displacing them in the process (Ramakrishnan, 2012). The growth has not led to improvement in the social and economic conditions of UP's masses (Ramakrishnan, 2012). The government's neoliberal stance continues in its emphasis on private investment in agricultural sector and acquisition of farmers' land at below market rates for private development (Srivastava, 2011; Ramakrishnan, 2012).

Bernstein's understanding of agrarian neoliberalism and its implication for rural labour find resonance in the above description. There is no doubt whatsoever though that the recent economic growth seems to have largely bypassed agriculture and rural labour. State policies have increasingly given capitalist interests a definite toehold on crucial assets like land and more generally in the agricultural sector by relaxing land laws, facilitating investment by large companies in agricultural retail trade. The numerically predominant small and marginal farmers are increasingly forced to look for alternate sources to augment their minimal incomes from agriculture. Not only are these opportunities an erratic source of income, but they are increasingly hard to come by as numerous labourers compete for casual work at the bottom of India's informal

economy under very oppressive conditions. In terms of social, income and power status as well, they are situated at the bottom of Indian society (Lerche, 2012). More importantly, the relevance of Bernstein's classes of labour as an analytical tool is reiterated in this context of a fragmented labouring class moving in and out of agriculture and other occupations and for understanding the social relations it is involved in.

The following section deals with the implications of such developments in agriculture for rural labour generally and rural female labour in particular.

3.3. Capitalist Agrarian Transformations and Female Labour: A General Note

From an analysis of the country's agrarian crisis and the state of agriculture in UP, it is clear that neoliberal globalisation and other historical and recent trends have significantly impacted agriculture. Given the hitherto intertwined relationship between agriculture and rural labour, the next logical question then is how has this transformation implicated rural labour and specifically female members of low caste labouring households? If the agrarian structure shows not insignificant continuities (land ownership, caste-class overlap) then have rural labour relations also remained unchanged?

This research is focussed on female members of low caste rural labouring households. However, most Indian case studies on rural labour focus on male labour while female labour remains a muted subject. The few field based case studies where female labour is the primary subject, draw on evidence from south India or selected green revolution areas. Studies on rural labour in UP concentrate mainly on the western region. Very few cover the eastern part of the state, the focus of this thesis. These works only occasionally refer to female labour. In view of these restrictions, the approach that this section then adopts is as follows. First, evidence on various aspects of low caste rural labour from various regions is discussed. The second part will consider the evidence available on these from east UP; as much as possible, gender and caste aspects will be highlighted.

Most of the works on rural labour are village based studies and the obvious starting (rather, turning) point for these studies is the capitalist penetration of agriculture, particularly in the form of green revolution, as an entry point to discuss rural labour relations. At the same time, they rightly emphasise on the importance of local histories, particularly regarding land reforms and the regional political context and state interventions, in understanding evolving agrarian relations. Here, I will focus on labour relations. Though the importance of migration in rural livelihoods is acknowledged, it is not discussed here because rural female labourers are primarily agricultural and village based (NCEUS, 2008; Breman, 2007).¹⁶ According to one estimate drawing on census data, the percentage of female agricultural labour increased from 25.6 to 43.4 for the period 1961-2001, with female agricultural labourers constituting 46.9 percent of the labourforce. Across India, SC/STs account for 80 percent of the agricultural labour (NCEUS, 2008). In some cases, women combine agriculture with family based migration and/or self-employment (predominantly livestock rearing). This should not be taken to mean that women are not involved in agricultural or other migrant work (Breman, 1990; Rogaly, et al., 2001, 2002; Mosse, et al., 2002; Srivastava, 2005). Moreover, migration is mainly a male trend in eastern UP as will become clear subsequently.

Land relations are a good starting point to study labour relations. Kapadia's (1995), village study in post green revolution rural Tamil Nadu showed increasing economic **polarisation and proletarianisation** of the scheduled caste Pallars. In the 1970s landlords had primarily sold land to better-off middle caste tenants, some of whom over the years managed to consolidate their holdings. This emerging rich peasantry coexisted with the traditional rich landowners. On the other hand, the Pallars, who were small tenants and marginal peasants, became agricultural wage labourers and some of them lost all land in due course. Unlike the middle peasantry, they have been unable to access non-agricultural employment. Their extreme poverty meant the lack of a minimum start-up capital and their untouchable status meant that others were

¹⁶ There few examples where women are engaged in non-agricultural work as in the case of village based female weavers in Tamil Nadu (De Neve, 2002). This has to be located in the context of rural industrialisation and caste ideology. Heyer's (2001) long term work in Tamil Nadu indicated that while in early 1980s, SC labourers were agricultural labourers, by mid 1990s there was some evidence of economic diversification. But they still constituted most of the agricultural labour. In the case of women, there was evidence of only one or two being involved in other employment as domestic workers in a school or in construction activity.

unwilling to lend them. At the same time, there have been increasing economic divisions within caste groups on account of education or jobs which have strained caste and kinship relations and limited the development of class consciousness (Kapadia, 1995). One consequence of this has been the strengthening of caste identities (Kapadia, 1995). For instance, she shows that while the Pallar female labourers are aware of their common economic interests, they remain divided along neighbourhood and caste ties which play an important role in accessing employment.

In the context of rural Tamil Nadu, Ramachandran (1990) also attested to economic differentiation in his area of field study. At the same time a blanket generalisation is difficult. The extent of polarisation and proletarianisation may vary according to local ecological conditions. The work of Athreya, et al. (1990) in Tamil Nadu showed greater polarisation in the wet area where the middle peasantry constituted a small class and, less polarisation in the dry area where the class of middle is significant. The wet area had a higher number of landless labourers whereas the dry area had more poor peasants. The study of Djurfeldt, et al. (2008), also from Tamil Nadu and covering a span of twenty-five years, showed a limited degree of polarisation and differentiation. Yet, another study from Tamil Nadu shows that overall landlessness doubled from early 1980s to late 2000s, but the proportion of landless SC slightly declined reflecting decreased land inequalities as the scheduled castes came into land (Harriss, et al., 2010).

Based on her work in rural AP, Garikipati (2009) has pointed out that **men were the primary beneficiaries of land redistribution** which allowed them to withdraw from exploitative agricultural wage labour and tied labour relations into own cultivation. Women had no such option. Da Corta and Venkateshwarlu's (1999) work also supports this. Gupta (2002) also concluded that even in a state like West Bengal which is reputed to have performed better than other states on land reforms agenda, women remained marginalised. According to Gupta, part of the problem is the socio-cultural identification of women as a part of a family and not as an autonomous individual. Even where joint titles have been granted, it is men who control such assets. On top of this, left organisations do not accord priority to 'women's issues' for it would undermine the class struggle.

A common observation made in relevant literature is that the adoption of new farming practices, technological application and changing cropping patterns, led to new patterns of labour demand—concentrated at peak season time and in certain tasks that were still done by hand. Kapadia (1995) has pointed out that while the primary male task of ploughing was mechanized, female tasks like transplanting and weeding were not. The sexual division of labour based on the culturally superior status of men was not challenged. Consequently, there has been a **feminization of agricultural labour**. Breman has also referred to a gendered division of labour wherein women work as casual agricultural labourers, primarily inside or near the village because of their domestic and reproductive responsibilities and that they are preferred in certain tasks like picking fruits because of their diligence (Breman, 2007). This is an indication of the centrality of the **gendered division of labour** in new cropping patterns as well (also see De Neve, 2002 for gendered work perception in a rural but non-agricultural setting).

Drawing on her work in another area of Tamil Nadu, Heyer (2011), associated feminisation of agriculture with movement of male labour into non-agricultural employment, cultivation of less labour intensive crops and emerging new accumulation strategies of rich farmers in the face of declining agricultural productivity. More importantly, as pointed out by Kapadia (1995) women do perform male tasks in own cultivation and occasionally as wage labourers as well. As such, women bore an unequal burden of household responsibility and indeed contribute more regularly to household expense. Da Corta and Venkateshwarlu (1999) and Garikipati (2009) also found this to be the case in rural AP.

Drawing on their fieldwork in rural AP, Da Corta and Venkateshwarlu (1999) agree that feminisation has occurred but their explanation of is derived from rapid decline of male participation in agricultural tasks like threshing which was jointly done by men and women. One reason for exit of male labour is that these jobs are low paid. Another is that having benefited from government policies providing land, credit and other assets, men increasingly moved into own work. At the same time, men continued to rely on female wages for household reproduction. Da Corta and Venkateshwarlu (1999) have described such gendered division of labour as also reflecting a class division between ‘a non-propertyied/waged workforce composed of

women....and self-employed men...' (Da Corta and Venkateshwarlu, 1999, p.104). Garikipati's (2009) evidence from rural AP also attests to higher involvement of women in agricultural wage labour. This is because men are largely into better paid work involving the use of assets owned by men and alternate employment opportunities and migration are mostly the preserve of men.

Wages are distinguished on the basis of the type of employment primarily and can be paid in cash, kind or a combination of the two (Ramachandran, 1990; Kapadia, 1995). Irrespective of this and despite the fact that wage rates are more than what labourers received in 1970s and '80s, a gender wage gap is commonly observed in most literature (Athreya, et al., 1990; Kapadia, 1995; Heyer, 2001). High male wages are attributed to the higher status and more arduous nature of male tasks (Kapadia, 1995). Even where there is a possibility of women earning more, as is likely in better paid contract work, a portion of the wages are appropriated by their male relatives who recruited them for the job (Kapadia, 1995). This unequal wage system is also mediated by the existing patron-client relations between male employers and male labour. Kapadia has noted that when men took paddy, threshed by women, to the employer's house, men would receive some paddy as 'gift'. Wage rates could also be influenced by rates in neighbouring villages, individual economic status and labour availability vis-à-vis its demand at different times in agricultural season and the socio-economic position of the employer (Kapadia, 1995). Local availability of alternate employment opportunities, government policies like the MGNREGA and the politicisation of labourers are also known to influence the wage structure (Harriss et al., 2010).

An important area of change has been the **modes of employment**. This has to do with the decline of traditional social relations and casualisation of the labour force. The two most prevalent types are daily waged work and piece-rate or contract work (Athreya, et al., 1990; Kapadia, 1995; Heyer, 2001). The former implies a fixed rate for specified hours. Labourers are supervised by the employer or recruiter. Contract work implies a prior agreed amount for a fixed job, irrespective of the time taken to complete the work. Supervision is not required. According to Heyer (2001), male and female labourers preferred contract work because it paid better. Athreya, et al., (1990) and Kapadia (1995) noted the decline of the system of labour exchange among small

farmers and labourers. However, in transitional societies like that of Arunachal Pradesh, exchange labour could still be significant (Harriss-White, 2009). Hired labour may be common even on family labour based farms because of caste considerations or farmer's access to better paid non-agricultural employment (Athreya, et al., 1990). Labour practices can also be shaped by caste and cultural ideology (Gidwani, 2001). For example, scheduled caste Koli labourers prefer group based contract work because it does away with the need for close supervision and spares them the constant nagging and humiliation by the employer. At the same time, it allows the Patel (a cultivating caste) employers to project themselves as progressive and superior. For women, this has meant withdrawal into the private arena.

Recruitment depends on the mode of employment. In daily wage work, any person who is aware of work opportunity can recruit others, while in contract work the contractor recruits young and skilled people (Kapadia, 1995; Athreya, 1990). Recruitment is overwhelmingly shaped by locality and caste ties (Kapadia, 1995; Athreya, 1990). Recruiters exercise significant power and influence as sources of employment and credit (Kapadia, 1995, Athreya; 1990).

Debt plays an important role in labour relations. For example, Athreya, et al. (1990) show that in wet areas, in cultivation where demand for skilled labour is high, employers extend loans to their workers so that these skilled workers would continue to regularly work for them. Heyer (2001) highlights the role of debt in curtailing labourers' attempts at independence from their oppressors, but which paradoxically, ended in them becoming more dependent on the employers. For example, government provided partial funding for house construction. Labourers borrowed from their employers to invest in this and in the process ended up being more dependent on them. Debt has for long been a ground for capitalist social and economic dominance and a basis for labour mobilisation and relations. Though based on inequality, such arrangements are not feudalistic, but found in capitalist social relations and perceived as insurance (for example, Bardhan & Rudra, 1980). It should be noted that debt based labour relations are not the same as traditional bonded labour (Bardhan & Rudra, 1978).

It is widely agreed that traditional bonded labour is no longer found in villages. Breman (1985) has documented this in the context of Gujarat's capitalist agricultural development, displacement of Brahmin landlords by commercially oriented Patidars as the dominant caste and various government interventions. According to him, traditional bonded labour or *halipratha* has disintegrated. He described it as a feudal mode of exploitation, a debt based bondage between large farmers and Halpati agricultural labour (and by extension his family) (Breman, 1985). This system was rooted in the servility and ritualistic inferiority of the *hali* (bonded labourer) and could also involve physical violence. Central to *Halipratha* was a complex web of economic and other obligations on both sides. **Neobondage**, on the other hand, is more of an economic and impersonal relationship, contractual and comparatively of shorter duration and does not involve family members by extension. It is rooted in exploitative capitalist social relations.

In contrast to Breman, Ramachandran (1990), in his study of agrarian relations and unfree labour in a Tamil Nadu village found that these are increasingly a characteristic of non-wage labour relations between landlords and agricultural labourers, though he denied a strict segregation between the two: for example, guarding crop, working as a driver for the landlord, running errands like buying things from the market and various household chores. These are either unpaid or remunerated at very low rates and are often delayed. Despite this an agricultural labour provides these '**labour services**' to landlords because they are a source of food, work and credit when required. The relationship involves obligations on both sides such as the employer providing the labour with employment and a place to live, while the labourer is obligated to work off his loans or provide priority services to this household. Labour services can be provided by men or women of any age and even children.

As pointed out by Da Corta and Venkateshwarlu (1999) green revolution did increase agricultural productivity initially but it also increased labour (given availability of new employment opportunities) and production costs. Rich capitalist farmers responded by adopting mechanisation and diversifying into related activities such as trading, processing, transport, investing in educations of their sons etc. **Tied harvest and labour arrangements** were another way by which they sought to economise on

costs, more so with falling agricultural returns.¹⁷ Under tied harvest arrangements, rich farmers engaged in trading, advanced loans to small farmers to cover production costs and other expenses in the off-season. In return, small farmers had to pay back the agreed amount with the produce. Rich farmers might lease out a small plot of land to small farmers also in return for a fifty percent share in the harvest. Tied labour arrangements also involved debt/lease arrangements. In return, labourers are expected to provide priority services to creditors, plough their fields, tend to livestock and perform other household chores as required. The arrangement assures the creditors or rich farmers of a regular and cheap labour supply, particularly in the peak season. The lease arrangement also tapped into the labour of women of the attached household. Garikipati (2009) found similar tied labour arrangements in her survey of two villages in AP.

According to Da Corta and Venkateshwarlu (1999), tied labour arrangements are different from the old system of labour bondage: they are of shorter duration, not rooted in violence or ritualistic discourse of purity-pollution and the terms are contested. Nonetheless, they are based on expectations of patronage and an obligation to provide 'labour service'. To the extent such ties restrict the mobility and ability of labourers to sell their labour power in the market for higher wages, it is an unfree relation.

Rural labour is engaged in patron-client relations and varying degrees of unfree labour relations for various reasons. Some have already been indicated above. More generally, these have to be understood in the contemporary structural context of poverty, socio-economic dominance of a minority, caste and gender discrimination and the role of dominant classes as 'gatekeepers' i.e. in mediating/controlling access to and distribution of public resources (Ramachandran, 2011; Pattenden, 2011). Pattenden (2011) has argued that 'gatekeeping' also served to discipline labour as well as maintain dominant class interests by co-opting low level gatekeepers who performed monitoring and other functions for the main dominant class/gatekeepers.

¹⁷ This seems to be in line with Srivastava's (1989) proposition that forms of attached labour increase as agrarian development proceeds and this is a reflection of capitalist requirements.

Dissolution of old style labour bondage, decline in the political status of upper castes, rural economic diversification, higher wages than in the past, some minimum economic improvement in the position of labourers, a growing consciousness of their exploitation and organisation have been associated with a more vocal and confrontational labouring class (Bremar, 1990; Kapadia, 1995; Heyer, 2001). But as pointed out by Da Corta and Venkateshwarlu (1999), there is a gender angle to this struggle. Since men refuse to perform low waged or demeaning wage labour, the burden has increasingly fallen on women to secure household subsistence by undertaking even those wage labour activities as refused by men. In this manner **women's exploitation and humiliation subsidises male labour struggles**. Another indication of this is that while men have managed to move away from tied labour arrangements, the number of women in such arrangements have increased—as unpaid attached family labour independently incurring debt against their labour. This and the lack of women's ownership of productive assets are responsible for their **weak bargaining position in the households and in the labour market** (Da Corta & Venkateshwarlu, 1999; Garikipati, 2009).

From the above description it is clear that rural labour relations have definitely changed. Women are disproportionately concentrated in agriculture. Economic differentiation and rural proletarianisation exist to varying extents. Though caste and class overlap to a significant extent, there are internal differentiations and this is a ground for labour fragmentation. Within agriculture, a gendered division of labour and a gender wage gap are common. Locality based networks, caste identities and gendered ideologies underline recruitment processes. Female labourers are involved in unfree labour arrangements. This, coupled with their income and asset poverty, has perpetuated the exploitation of female agricultural labourers. Does this description apply to female labourers in eastern UP? This is taken up in the following sub-section. The issue of labour struggles will be left until the fourth section.

3.3.1. Capitalist Agrarian Transformations and Female Labour: Eastern UP

As mentioned previously, most studies on UP draw on field evidence from the western part of the state. Wiser & Wiser (2001), Wadley (1994), Lanjouw & Stern (1998) and Dreze (1997) are long-term fieldwork based studies that describe rural

society and economy in western UP. Such longitudinal works are not available in the case of east UP, though there is a set of literature that sheds light on rural society generally, for instance, Gould (1964), Singh (1970) and Cohn (1987). On rural labour per se, Srivastava (1989, 1999), Lieten & Srivastava (1999) and Lerche's (1994, 1995, 1998, 1999, 2003) village based studies from eastern UP are the main sources of information and this section draws heavily on their work. As stated previously, female labour has rarely been of primary concern in rural labour studies set in eastern UP and also generally in the state. As such, what follows is a general review of available literature and caste and gender aspects are brought out as far as possible. In the process, this sub-section also serves to indicate the main areas of enquiry for this thesis.

The picture one gets from a reading of early village based studies from eastern UP, is that of an upper caste dominated economy and society, with scheduled castes at the bottom (Singh, 1970; Cohn, 1987).

This can be seen in Singh's (1970) depiction of a village in north-eastern UP. According to Singh (1970), Rajputs and Thakurs who were the big farmers, were only involved in a supervisory capacity in agriculture. The middle castes like Ahirs and Kurmis were directly involved in cultivation, while the SCs who were mostly agricultural labourers were primarily dependent on wage labour. Those at the top of this hierarchy wielded the most political and economic power. The 1950s and '60s also witnessed conflicts between various classes on wage and land issues. On such occasions dominant castes closed ranks in view of their collective class interest, though otherwise factionalism within castes was not unknown. Though there was some evidence of castes taking up non-traditional occupations, such mobility was not seen in class status (Singh, 1970). Purity-pollution discourse still dominated social life and among other things, this was reflected in the spatial organisation of the village and the seclusion of upper caste women. At the same time, some change was visible. For instance, changes in local revenue and political institutions under land and other reforms and more importantly, a changing social environment in which SCs could move more freely.

Since then, agrarian relations, as well as the political scenario have shown significant change, but some continuity as well, for instance, **upper castes are still the dominant landowners while agricultural labourers are overwhelmingly scheduled castes** (see pp. 74-75; Lerche, 1998; Srivastava, 1999; Lieten & Srivastava, 1999). Between 1970s and 1990s, rural social differentiation increased owing to land reforms, green revolution and other public policies. The period saw mechanisation, fragmentation of landholdings, shifting cropping patterns with different political economies of labour, rural economic diversification etc. The Indian government's policy turn in the early 1990s, saw the introduction of agrarian neoliberalism marked by a much 'trimmed' state and agricultural corporatisation. So a question that emerges is what is happening to rural female labourers since the 1990s?

Shankar's (1993) small survey of agricultural labourers in eastern UP, is a good starting point. He points out that by the early 1990s, agricultural productivity had increased and so had demand for labour. Declining tenancy, emerging migration and dissolution of old patron-client relations were also observed.¹⁸ Scheduled caste men and women gave up their traditional occupations which for long had been perceived as degrading and a source of their 'polluted' status. But agricultural wage employment continued to be significant and even wages had slightly increased, but more as a capitalist tactic to ensure labour supply. Contractual work was on a rise. On the down side though, mechanisation was being introduced and this was adversely affecting labour demand, particularly in ploughing. The high incidence of non-agricultural wages in household incomes led Shankar to conclude that labourers were no longer simply agricultural. Indebtedness was high even in the early 1990s and credit was largely taken from informal sources. Government policies relating to credit, rural employment and those targeting poverty were making a miniscule difference.

An important observation is that **capitalist agrarian change has gendered effects which differentially influence women depending upon their caste and class position**. According to Sharma (1985), green revolution exacerbated economic

¹⁸ Bardhan and Rudra (1978) point out that declining tenancy could be due to tenancy evictions, particularly in more advanced villages as landlords increasingly took to self-cultivation with agriculture becoming more remunerative. They and Ruthven (2002) point out that small tenants and labourers lost access to land as a result of this.

differentiation between classes and intensified polarisation between men and women. For example, on the one hand Bhumihar women observe seclusion, even vis-à-vis some male members of own family and are completely engaged in domestic work. At the most, as Sharma observed in a couple cases, women would recruit labour or fetch water, but under the cover of darkness. Their only similarity with Chamar women is that the latter too are responsible for domestic work.

Sharma points out that a rigid observation of socio-cultural customs is not seen among Chamar women, given the tiny areas on which they live and their poverty meant that women had to undertake wage labour as well. Female Chamar wage labourers received lesser wages than their menfolk. They also provide their traditional services as midwives and even perform either unpaid or lowly remunerated forced labour. Unlike Bhumihar women, Chamar women make important contributions to daily household reproduction. An improvement in the economic position of a household is strongly related to the withdrawal of women from the production sphere i.e. **men's improved economic position is tied to women's subservience and domination.**

Sharma (1985) makes another point, similar to Kapadia (1995). Though there is differentiation within caste groups and faultlines appear as individuals contest for political power and resources, caste remains the predominant organising principle. Thus, even **labourers' growing consciousness of their exploitation and collective interest is subsumed by the caste identity. Development and articulation of class interests are also limited by the existence of attached labour relations** (Bardhan & Rudra, 1978).

Based on their survey of sixty-five eastern UP villages, Bardhan and Rudra (1978), argued that **interlinked tenant and credit relations are common.** Tenants are advanced loans by the landlords for a variety of purposes or the latter themselves may partly bear production costs. This relationship is not akin to feudal exploitation. Bardhan and Rudra (1978) found the incidence of overlapping tenant-credit relationships to be more in relatively advanced villages where landlords were not primarily into money lending but self-cultivation on the basis of hired labour and they invested high yield variety seeds and chemical fertilisers on the leased plot. Tenants provided unpaid or lowly remunerated labour services to landlord/employer/creditor,

though there was no general pattern to this. Tenants were not prohibited from entering into tenancy arrangements with other landlords. Though rooted in inequality and exploitation, Bardhan & Rudra (1978) concluded that such tied credit-labour relationships were not representative of feudal mode of surplus extraction but seen as serving specific purposes. For the capitalist, it served to secure cheap and reliable labour and for the tenants and labourers, it was a source of food and employment security.

Srivastava (1989) also showed how production relations, accumulation processes of big farmers and reproduction strategies of labourers, together provide a basis for labour dependency and exploitation; for instance, through lease arrangements and credit ties. His field evidence from two villages in eastern UP shows that credit ties are likely to exist along lease arrangements, particularly in cases of labourers or poor peasant tenants who are also more likely to provide priority labour services to their creditor/lessors, work for them at low wages or even perform unpaid labour at times. Labourers or poor peasants enter into such lease arrangements for subsistence purposes and take loans to meet production and consumption costs, whereas, employers not only get a share, but also avail of labour at reduced costs or even for nothing. In few cases where farm servants had leased in small plots of land from their employers, the wives of the former are obligated to work for the employer. The more developed a village is, the more likely it is for these interlocked relations to exist and in fact, they play an important role in securing cheap labour.

Shankar (1996) also found evidence of **debt based bondage** among the landless Kol tribals. Though *Gram Sabha* land was redistributed among them, the land is effectively controlled by the landlords. Labourers sought to meet important expenses by becoming a bonded labour. The 'interest' is paid through labour. A small amount of poor quality grain is paid as a wage. The debtor is also given a small plot of land for cultivation. Landlords may provide some production cost and take a percentage of produce or rent out their assets like pumpsets. But unlike the past decades, this relationship was not one of absolute dependence. These labourers could undertake wage labour and where family labour (wives and children) was involved some kind of remuneration, no matter how little, was made. There are instances where earnings

from migration and other non-farm employment opportunities have been used to free bonded labourers.

Up till the mid 1980s, the government played an important role in vesting SC castes with land, providing subsidies for seeds and fertilizers and provisioning credit (Ruthven and Kumar, 2002).¹⁹ Ruthven and Kumar (2002) identify three major changes in agricultural labour relations in this background. First was the **emergence of piece rate labour groups**. This became increasingly popular for several reasons. From the perspective of labourers, it was better paid and they did not have to bear the indignity of supervision. From the perspective of capitalist farmers, it allowed them to secure labour relatively easily according to their requirements and under the piece-rate system, labourers worked faster. Piece-rate work is normally found in paddy transplantation and harvesting. However, labour costs could also be influenced by factors such as availability of non-agricultural employment in close proximity or whether the capitalist farmer had access to the labour of his tenants or others dependent on him for social and economic reasons. These performed underpaid and priority services for big farmers.

Second, to economise on rising production costs and to reduce their dependence on local labourers, big farmers have resorted to recruiting incoming tribal and scheduled caste migrant labourers from MP. Migrant labourers are preferred because they are better workers, reliable, do not need to be supervised and importantly keep local wages depressed. This is a sore point with the local labour whose gets less employment and whose bargaining power is also constrained. Finally, the system of *harvahi* or attached labour has significantly declined. Under this system, the attached labourer and his family provided regular priority services to the big farmer, but at market rates. There was no time limit and it could be passed on from one generation to another. In return, the attached labourer, received some advance money, a plot to cultivate for subsistence, a daily wage in kind and the farmer could help with inputs as well. This was even preferred by some labourers because it worked as an insurance against food insecurity and provided some work. *Harvahi* still exists in a modified

¹⁹ According to Ruthven and Kumar (2002), off-farm employment tapered off after the mid 1980s. Government sponsored works were replaced by private informal casual jobs, particularly in the construction sector. In view of increasing competition and limited work options, SC labourers could only access these through 'networking'.

form but on a much smaller extent because of mechanisation and labourers now own some land to subsist on and have the option of off-farm work.

Ruthven and Kumar (2002) point out that while the SCs contested *harvahi* under the influence of dalit activism, tribal labourers initially (1980s) sought to maintain the system. In fact, such ties continue to exist as a part of patron-client relations, particularly in the case of worst off labourers. In a context of employment scarcity and weak bargaining powers, these labourers or tenants continue to provide regular priority services to their 'patron' at below market wages in return for food, credit, employment, access to public resources etc.

Much like Ruthven and Kumar (2002), Lerche (1995, 1999, 2003) also noted the **weakening of traditional bonded labour relations**. As described by Lerche, at the time of independence, the traditional bonded labour relation was one where a Chamar household was attached to a Thakur household. The Chamar worked on the Thakur's fields and tended to livestock. This relationship was not time bound. The Chamar's wife also worked in the field, did cleaning work and even provided services as a midwife. In return, the Chamar household was provided with food, a larger share in the harvest and were given a plot of land to subsist on. This relationship between a Thakur and his *niji* Chamar was marked by debt, physical violence and sexual abuse of women.²⁰

Such *niji* arrangements still exist but in a modified form (the changing labour relation has partly to be understood in relation to a successful struggle of Chamar labourers, see the following section). In Lerche's (1995) field area, it was still common in the early 1990s. Though a *niji* Chamar still provides priority services to his Thakur employer, he does not need to present himself at the Thakur's place everyday, but is contacted as and when his services (which now did not involve tasks like ploughing) are required. The Chamar may be asked by the Thakur to recruit labourers. In several cases, the Chamars had borrowed money from the Thakurs and this was an important reason for their continuing in *niji* relation as otherwise they were required to repay debts with interest and provide *begar* (forced labour) till such time. Some were given

²⁰ Lerche (1995) has translated *niji* as 'our own'. It's literal meaning is 'private'. Both imply the same meaning i.e. the exclusive nature of the relation.

small plots of land for sharecropping and they also did *begar*. Like Ruthven and Kumar (2002), Lerche (1995, 1999) also noted some labourers entering into such ties because they are a source of credit and work. This was an indication of the general dominance of the Thakurs; the Chamars performed wage labour for Yadav farmers at market rates but since these provided less employment, Chamars had to rely on Thakurs and more so in the off-season. This does not mean that the Chamars are not aware of their social and economic oppression (Lerche, 1995). Rather, according to Lerche (1995), such relations are buttressed by patron-client ideology in the broader village economy and society.

Lerche (1999) also mentions a system where landowners leased out a portion of land for paddy cultivation and met part of the production cost. The labouring household met remaining input costs, worked on it and received one-third of the produce. This arrangement was about as profitable for landlords as cultivation of paddy on wage labour basis. Landowners could avoid the threat that labour conflicts posed to labour supply. Moreover, women of these labouring households did *begar* and provided labour services to the lessor household first. In general also, women and other non-migrating household members were expected to participate in sugarcane harvest and weed the fields of landowners. For this, they were allowed to take the leafy part of the sugarcane and access the fields of landowners for grazing their livestock. Srivastava (1999) also described a somewhat similar lease arrangement, but one organised on a half-half share basis. He too noted that the big and medium landowners (mostly upper castes) were the primary lessors and land was primarily leased in by SC (mostly landless or small landowners).

An important distinction is made by Lerche (1999) between indebted and non-indebted labourers—but both providing priority labour services—is the latter can at least refuse working for their employer and limit the scope of *begar*. In both cases, nonetheless, women bear a greater burden of unfree labour relations. Related to this and other unfree labour relations is that the varying extents to which labouring households depend on their ‘oppressors’ for whatever reasons, is often a ground for clashes among labourers, particularly in periods of labour conflicts (Lerche, 2003).

Interlinked land, labour and credit relationships in agricultural labour markets were noted by Rajni also (2007). She observed that most of the labouring households were SC and landless, involved in agricultural casual wage labour in the absence of other opportunities and only a minority leased in land. Most of these labouring households were indebted to big Bhumihar farmers. Most of the tenants had also taken credit from landowners on interest and labourers (as well as their wives) provided landowners with under-waged labour services on a priority basis. Bhumihars find it convenient to lease out their poor quality and distant small plots of land. A significant number of labourers also take credit on interest against a promise of priority labour service. Such interlinking of land, labour and credit secures Bhumihars a ready supply of labour and several such relationships consolidate their positions as socio-economic benefactors of labourers.

As is evident, one implication of agricultural modernisation is that labour demand is concentrated around season time (Lerche 1995, 1999, 2003; Srivastava, 1999; Diwakar, 2004). Big landowners, who were the major source of demand for labourers, have taken to cultivation themselves and they also do not need as much labour because of subdivision of their holdings over time (Lerche 1995, 1999, 2003; Srivastava, 1999). Alternate better wage work opportunities are increasingly available (Lerche, 1999; Srivastava, 1999; Diwakar, 2004). Consequently, occupational patterns of agricultural labourers have also changed. The nature of **occupational diversification** is also a reflection of socio-economic status (though there are exceptions): regular salaried employment is significant among upper castes, while SCs are at the bottom of the occupational hierarchy concentrated as they are in agriculture (Srivastava, 1999; Lieten & Srivastava, 1999; also see Lerche, 2010). Srivastava (1999) observes that from the perspective of labourers, occupational diversification was a route out of exploitative and oppressive socio-economic relations, while for big landowners it was a way out of a complex system of obligation. The latter could continue accessing labour through various forms of attached labour.

This finds mention in Lerche (1995) who pointed out that it is common for members of labouring households to be involved in migrant work and better paying local non-agricultural employment in nearby towns. The same is seen in Srivastava (1999). He

also pointed out that SC labouring households had increasingly turned to petty forms of self-employment in combination with migration and wage labour. But middle castes like Yadavs and Kurmis, depended primarily on self-employment and own cultivation. Their women also had mostly withdrawn from casual labour. Another study found labourers to be predominantly engaged in agricultural wage labour and at the same time, most undertook better remunerated local non-agricultural work as in brick kilns or construction (Diwakar, 2004). At the same time, this should not be mistaken as a reduction of labour dependency on big farmers. Labourers continue to work for large farmers for lower wages and as a part of various tied arrangements because the overall context of surplus labour, insubstantial landholdings and stagnating productive employment opportunities has not changed (Diwakar, 2004). Construction, brick kilns, agricultural processing, transportation are some of the sources of non-agricultural employment (Srivastava, 1999).

Migrant work, as an occupational diversification option, has negative consequences for those left behind in the village. According to Paris, et al. (2005), migration is primarily male oriented and more among the landless who are completely dependent upon seasonal wage agricultural labour; though it may be undertaken by farmers as well in view of their small land base and lack of local alternate employment.

Paris, et al.'s (2005) study of three districts in eastern UP showed that women are left behind to take care of agriculture and household responsibilities. But, in the absence of male family members, they have had to bear an increasing burden of agricultural work themselves and/or hire labour for works traditionally done by men. Most of them cannot afford to pay wages and also face difficulty in recruiting labour or making arrangements for tractor ploughing during peak seasons. One option is to rely on exchange labour, but this still involves a lot of work. All this is done in addition to their domestic chores. One possible positive outcome of male outmigration is that women may possess greater control over remittances, farming related decision or daily household decisions. However, Paris, et al. (2005) found that in most households, irrespective of migration, men still continued to exercise most authority. Male income was perceived as the primary household income. Additionally, women's

limited mobility led her to lease out the land which adversely affects food security of the household.

Lerche (1999) also hinted at gendered consequences of male outmigration when he observed that by the late 1990s, most young men were involved in migrant work and even though they returned in peak season times, their participation in agricultural wage labour was on the decline, except perhaps, in the few better waged tasks. This meant that women and old men who could not migrate bore a greater burden of agricultural wage labour year round.

By now, it is clear from the above description that rural labour relations have changed considerably in eastern UP, but at the same time, there are elements of continuities as well. The few aspects of female labour relations, that available literature throws light on, show similarities with female labour relations generally. We now know that the upper castes are the dominant class and the dalits are at the bottom of the socio-economic hierarchy. Though the power of the former over the latter is not absolute or backed by open violence anymore, unfree labour relations are a common reality and more so in the case of women. Casualisation of labourers and contract work are common. Occupational diversification has occurred, but it is largely male labour that has delinked itself from agriculture. Female labourers are still agrarian, village based and non-migrant. Factors such as caste, class and gender shape and influence labour relations and the impact of capitalist developments more generally. These are also contours for labour fragmentation and inhibit development of labour solidarity.

However, it should be noted that the above information is based on few village based case studies. While they provide a good background, there remain significant gaps in our knowledge of rural labour relations in eastern UP generally, and specifically, in the case of female members of low caste labouring households. For example, other than a very broad idea, we do not know the dominant forms of labour commodification and how these are combined with self-employment activities or other labour services. On female labour relations there are gaps in our knowledge on what agricultural tasks female labour is engaged in, the patterns of recruitment and modes of employment, wage relations, do female labourers combine cultivation and wage labour with some self-employment, do their labour relations differ depending

upon caste and class, what is their position in the labour market etc.—these are just some of the questions that remain unanswered.

Caste has figured predominantly in the narrative of rural labour relations in UP. There have also been changes in labour relations as seen above and the social and economic conditions of dalits have generally improved slightly since the 1990s (Kapur et al., 2010), but no structural changes. The evidence presented above indicates the resilient dominance of upper caste-class. We saw in the first chapter and here also, that gender and caste identities are incorporated in the capitalist logic to facilitate accumulation. In a situation where they have little leeway, can dalit labourers challenge their oppressors? What form does their political expression take? The issue of labour struggles is not unique to UP (for example, Sinha, 1982; Bhalla, 1999; Wilson, 1999) but what makes this particularly interesting is that in recent years. UP has had a low caste government in power. Has this regional political phenomenon had any impact on micro-level rural labour relations and on rural labour more generally? The next section will briefly look at evidence on this from eastern UP.

3.4. Labour Struggles in Eastern UP

The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) is primarily a regional phenomena; a political party headed by a dalit woman, Mayawati, for over a decade now. It is a party that draws overwhelming support from the dalits. Central to its fight against caste discrimination is capturing political power (Pai, 2007) and the politicisation of dalits (Lerche, 1999). The BSP has been in power in UP for brief periods in 1995, 1997, 2002-03 and its longest stint has been from 2007 to 2012. Dalits position in local political structures has improved with the BSP's prominence in the state (Jaoul, 2007). However, as pointed out by Lerche (1999), the party does not have an economic programme or a stand on labour struggles for wages, other than labourers' withdrawal from demeaning work and pursuing the 'politics of dignity' (Varshney, 2009).²¹ The concern here is not with BSP per se, but what its rise to power has meant for the dalit agricultural labourers (for an overview of BSP, see Duncan, 1999).

²¹ Politics of dignity refers to, for example, installation of statues of dalit leaders in public spaces and affirmative action (Varshney, 2009)

As argued by Lerche (1994), in UP, the mobilization and organisation of SCs takes place at the local and state level, with the electoral arena linking the two. Though aware of their exploitation, caste is the dominant framework within which struggles of agricultural labourers takes place.²² Dalit labour struggles play out at the level of hamlet or village. Unfree labour relations do not preclude the possibility of labour struggles occurring, but they may be limited by the political dominance of the landed from taking it to district or state level. This has been observed in the case of Jats in west UP (Lerche, 1995). Here, the eastern UP experience is discussed.

Lerche's (1994, 1995) village based fieldwork showed that caste is the organising principle for the village labour market and space. Thakurs of one hamlet depend upon the Chamars of a particular hamlet. This is almost an exclusive relation as far as agricultural work is concerned. Caste and class overlap to a great extent. Thakurs were the prominent landowners and Chamars worked on their fields. The first action by the latter was in the early 1970s against degrading courtyard work done for the Thakurs (in retaliation of Thakurs murdering a Chamar). The Chamars just stopped doing this work and the Thakurs responded by denying them access to their fields and resorting to physical violence. However, the Chamars persisted and after a few weeks, the Thakurs started doing the courtyard work themselves (also, they found it economically more prudent). The Chamar hamlet also has a caste panchayat that came to operate as a labour organisation after the above action. As described by Lerche (1994, 1995), the leaders of this panchayat take the demands of labourers to Thakurs. Negotiations take place directly between the two or through a middleman. If no bargain is reached, Chamars may strike.

Lerche (1994, 1995) points out that since the first labour conflict, the Chamars have gone on strike every few years, planned around peak season time as this gives them maximum leverage. They have also managed to access local government apparatus, in a regional context of the BSP's rise to power and with the help of a local BSP leader. The BSP has initiated various schemes for the development of dalits, for instance, school scholarships and housing allowance (Jeffery & Lerche, 2000). Importantly, the

²² In west UP there have been farmers' movements that draw on caste, but these are dominant farmer castes like the Jats. These movements have been concerned with surplus producing farmers and not agricultural labourers. This is not to deny labour struggles in western UP (Lerche, 1994).

BSP's political success has instilled a sense of dignity, pride and confidence among the dalit labourers (Jeffery & Lerche, 2000). The numerical preponderance of Yadav small farmers in the village and their increasing political clout at the regional level also challenged Thakur dominance.²³ There have been times when the village Thakurs have called labour from outside or the indebted and poorer labourers have not participated in the strikes, but this is far and between. Nor has the threat of Thakur violence been completely eliminated.

As argued by Lerche (1994, 1995), Thakur dominance coexists with agricultural labourers' awareness of their exploitation, as well as their rights. The labourers also resort to 'everyday weapons' such as arguing with Thakur employers or gossiping about them in offensive terms. Changing labour relations and occupational diversification have also helped this assertion. At the same time, patron-client relations are also common. The Thakurs are expected to defend their Chamar labourers and help out with credit, employment and any emergencies. The Chamars are expected to provide them priority services, may be at lower wage rates. According to Lerche (1995), patron-client relations serve a dual purpose: through these the upper caste-classes validate their dominance while appearing yielding to the labourers by making them some 'allowance'.

According to Lerche (1994, 1995), caste-class correspondence is common at a general level and as such, labour conflicts take on a social and economic hue. However, this broad based awareness of their exploitation has not transformed into collection action that draws on other labourers or even Chamars of other hamlets. Lerche (1994) observed that this was partly because overlapping socio-economic relations are more common between the Thakurs and Chamars. Another possible reason could be that these labourers are themselves divided by patron-client relations between Chamars and 'their' Thakurs. Lerche (2003) cites few examples, where these Chamars have been pressured into filing false statements with the police against other Chamars.

Then the Chamars themselves are not a homogenous group, but those who are in secure employment or are not completely dependent upon local wage labour are better

²³ The OBC Yadavs mainly ally themselves with the Samajwadi party (SP), which is a significant political phenomenon in the state. In fact, the SP and BSP were political allies in the early 1990s.

off then other Chamars (Lerche, 2003). Chamars of different hamlets do not share close socio-cultural ties. Rather each hamlet faces a different set of constraints, such as being surrounded by Thakur fields or being subjected to particularly brutal forms of suppression, which put them in a worse position (Lerche, 2003). Relations between Chamars and other low castes may also get strained (Lerche, 2003).

In sum, Lerche's works indicate important conclusions: possibility of resistance even in unfree labour relations; significance of local and regional power structures; consciousness of exploitation as labourers, but caste as the more dominant identity which limits the formation of a class for itself; and finally, how rural classes mediate the state institutions to benefit themselves.

Srivastava's (1999) field findings also show similar evidence on labour struggles. Thakur and Brahmin landowners sought to suppress a labour strike for wage hike with force, by closing off labourers' access to their fields and by denying them employment. But when the labourers persisted, the landowners had to give in. Another strike followed two years later. But this time there was no physical aggression and employers raised the wages. The reasons for demanding wage increase were the higher wages of public work programmes and increasing garden cultivation where employers paid higher wages to secure timely labour. Availability of better remunerated alternate employment also exerted upward pressure on local wages, particularly during peak season at crucial periods. Like Lerche, Srivastava's findings also point out that these strikes are initiated by those labourers whose houses and fields are not in close proximity of the Thakurs. Srivastava also notes the changing labour attitude, with SCs giving up their traditional occupations—however this—as participation in strikes—is circumscribed by the extent to which one is dependent upon the dominant caste-class.

Srivastava (1999) found caste to be an important axis of labour mobilisation and fragmentation. But unlike Lerche, he concluded that these sporadic labour conflicts were not restricted to any one caste, and the demands raised are indicative of class interests. There is considerable inter-caste economic differentiation within lower castes. On the whole though, class interests are much more sharply organised and

articulated among the landed where caste-class divergence is not as strong. These patterns are locally specific, making generalisation difficult.

Evidence is not available on the role of women in dalit labour struggles or how these impact female labourers, beyond Lerche's (1994, 1995) mention of women not being subjected to sexual harassment as before. On women and resistance, some evidence is available from Jeffery & Jeffery's (1996) work in western UP and though it is not on labour struggles, it shows how women resist and negotiate structures of oppression and exploitation differently. They argue that in the case of women, resistance cannot be understood simply as a public and collective confrontation, for it risks missing out how women create space for themselves (for example, control over household resources, asserting against other controlling family members), without seeking structural change. Such an approach helps to locate how caste and class mediate women's daily lives and this is important as pointed out by Sharma (1985, see pp.89-90).

Overall, this section serves to show that largely dalit agricultural workers have successfully waged labour struggle and there have been instances of violent flare ups, alongside, as the more routine everyday weapons of the weak. Labour struggles have to be understood in the background of local and regional configurations of political, economic and social power relations, contextualised with developments such as agricultural modernisation and occupational diversification.

The objective of this chapter was to understand how agrarian neoliberalism has affected low caste rural labourers and particularly the women.

It was established that the present crisis situation in Indian agriculture has much to do with the dominance of agrarian neoliberalism at the global level and its implementation on ground by the GOI. The worst affected are the small and marginal farmers and labourers who are mostly from low or scheduled castes. The continued relevance of the agrarian question of labour found resonance in the worsening position of labouring households under neoliberalism and the present agrarian distress. The same was observed in the case of UP as well. At the level of India and

UP, evidence agreed with Bernstein on differentiation amongst petty commodity producers and the ground reality of a fragmented labour.

There on the terrain shifted to rural female labourers from low caste households and how they were implicated in processes associated with agrarian neoliberalism. Here, we established that female labourers belong to low and scheduled castes and still likely to be agricultural. Labour markets tended to be caste and gender segregated. Non-class identities and networks dominate and preclude labour unity and class based action. Caste and gender are intrinsic to capitalist logic of surplus extraction and accumulation. This is manifest in the feminisation of agriculture (wherein gender wage gap and gendered division of labour are central) and in tied labour arrangements. It is clear that women have not benefited from new opportunities to the extent that men have. The same was the case in eastern UP, though here we have very little and indirect evidence on female members of low caste labouring households or their labour relations. Issues like forms of labour commodification, position in the labour market, terms and conditions of wage labour, bases of fragmentation or solidarity, evidence on unfree labour relations etc. for women emerge as some of the big gaps in our knowledge on women of low caste labouring households in eastern UP. On the theme of labour struggles we know almost nothing about female labourers, but based on Lerche and Srivastava's work primarily, we know that labour struggles do occur and what we need to look for in the fieldwork.

The next chapter will develop these emerging areas of enquiry in more detail and set out how these will be investigated in the field using Bernstein's framework.

Chapter 4

Fieldwork Methodology and Experience

This chapter deals with the fieldwork plan, methods used in field and the issues that arose during fieldwork.

To recapitulate, the objective of this research is to study labour relations of dalit female labourers in east UP. But since we do not know who the classes of labour are or what the general labour relations in the region, first these overall trends had to be established. Finally, this research aimed to study the rural political expression and struggles of these women labourers.

This chapter will begin by breaking down the general areas of enquiry into specific questions asked in the field. The second section then lays out the rationale for doing a qualitative work and a village study. It will very briefly discuss the primary methods used in the field. The process of choosing a district and then fieldwork villages is outlined in the third section. After this, some background information on the fieldwork sites is presented. In the fourth section, I recount my fieldwork experience, the personal challenges and practical difficulties encountered in carrying out the fieldwork. The chapter concludes with some ethical considerations that went into doing this research.

4.1. The Broad Areas of Enquiry and Specific Questions

In the previous two chapters we saw that though agriculture is still the best entry point to study rural labour (and more so in the case of women), labour originating from rural areas is not just rural or agricultural anymore. The context in which these labourers operate is framed by neoliberal globalisation which cannot be captured by a narrow understanding of the agricultural sector. It was concluded that Bernstein's 'classes of labour' is the best approximation of ground realities and can be used in the field to identify 'rural labour'. He defined classes of labour as those whose daily survival is dependent on them selling their labour power, combining casual labour and

self-employment activities, under increasingly uncertain and oppressive conditions. They are clearly the non-accumulating exploited class.

In the last chapter, a review of relevant literature in the Indian context helped ascertain the main aspects of rural low caste female labour relations. The eastern UP review proffered a general sketch on labour relations and struggles, with few insights on female labourers. I raised few questions regarding aspects on which there was no information. Here, I draw out the general areas of enquiry and specific questions in researching rural labour relations of women from low caste and particularly, dalit labouring households.

The first area of enquiry relates to a general socio-economic picture of the fieldwork location.

- (i) What have the capitalist developments in agriculture been over the past couple of decades, for instance, the extent of mechanisation, irrigation facilities, cropping patterns and labour use patterns?
- (ii) How has the landownership pattern changed and what is the social base of landownership presently?
- (iii) What changes have occurred in the local labour market with respect to occupational patterns, labour migration and development of self-employment and other alternative opportunities?
- (iv) Have the power relations changed over the years? If so, how? Does it reflect in institutions like panchayats or generally, for instance, in accessing the block officials, the police etc? Does the spatial organisation of the village follow dominant socio-economic relations?

The second area concerns labour relations of women from dalit labouring households.

- (i) The first task sought to establish the main forms of labour commodification, self-employment activities and other non-income generating activities but which generate value. Have women always been engaged in these works or has there been any change? What is the change and why?
- (ii) What are the modes of employment and wage structure?

- (iii) What about recruitment: is it organised through jobbers, personal networks, based on debt or on a preferential basis as per caste or locality etc?
- (iv) How do employers exercise control over labourers?
- (v) How did the terms and conditions of work evolve over the last twenty years and did female labourers have any say in it, for example, in negotiating wages and benefits?
- (vi) Is there any evidence of unfree labour relations? Do these 'ties' push women into performing unpaid attached labour? Increase their dependency on their employers/jobbers who maybe an important source of credit and employment in lean times? Restrict their scope for bargaining? What is the role of occupational diversification and remittances in this?
- (vii) Do labour relations differ depending upon the social and economic status of the employer?
- (viii) Is there any evidence of friction/competition among classes of labour, given the structural insecurities in getting wage employment? How does this compare with their relations vis-à-vis their employers?
- (ix) Are there any common bases of interest aggregation and articulation?
- (x) To the extent that male out-migration exists, how has it affected women's position, within households? Do women have greater control and access over income and resources? Does it give them greater decision making authority regarding assets like livestock or over farming decisions?

The third area of investigation is labour struggles.

- (i) How do female labourers understand government interventions which have specific distributional or accession consequences, for example, in accessing government schemes like the PDS or MGNREGA or the impact on individual mobility and grazing rights caused by privatisation of public roads or pastures.²⁴
- (ii) Is there any evidence of labour struggles? What forms do these take?

²⁴ Under the public distribution system (PDS), all below poverty line (BPL) card holders are eligible for a monthly ration of grains, sugar and kerosene at subsidised prices.

- (iii) What is the organising principle of these struggles: gender, caste, region or locality? Do these provide a common ground for labour mobilization or such social divisions fragment the labouring class?
- (iv) What are the objectives of labour action? Are they different from those of their male counterparts? Why?
- (v) What are the outcomes of these labour struggles?
- (vi) At a broad level, what are the implications of BSP's coming to power for labour struggles and labour relations in general.

4.2. Village-based Qualitative Study

This research explores relations between individuals embedded in specific socio-cultural and economic contexts. These relations are part of their everyday lives and not just their 'work'. The purpose was not to merely collect facts but to critically interpret and analyse the change in labour relations over time, to describe what is seen in terms of labour relations and relate these to a broader context. This research engaged with processes, with issues of agency, consciousness and resistance which can best be captured and explained in a qualitative framework.

A qualitative approach was also expected to be more productive, personalised and therefore less intimidating in working with a 'subject' (dalit women) not used to being in focus or simply being asked about anything outside of their 'four walls'. Given their gender roles are prescribed so strongly, getting women to interact is not a simple matter of them answering a survey question. Indeed, as I experienced in fieldwork, women believed themselves incapable of answering properly because they lacked '*buddhi*' (knowledge and intelligence) or experience of outside world. But when I explained my objective and stressed that I wanted to ask about their work, female labourers would readily agree to talk because 'only a woman can understand a woman's problem'. This approach would facilitate discussion of sensitive subjects like caste oppression, violence and gender relations.

Why a village study? Most studies on rural labour relations in India tend to locate themselves in the tradition of village studies. But apart from this, my reading of relevant literature led me to expect that female labourers were likely to be based in the

village or rather, operating from it. A village-level analysis is well suited to a descriptive mapping and comparative analysis of labour relations within and amongst the selected villages, while bringing out changes caused by institutions like caste associations, panchayats or in levels of poverty and indebtedness (Janakrajan, 1997). At the same time, this 'village' should not be treated as a closed unit. Doing so would risk out on losing how labour action in one village might lead labourers in another village to strike or in explaining the varying outcomes of strikes, as observed by Lerche (1999, 2003). Breman (1985, Breman et al., 1997) has also pointed out that explaining migration patterns or local power relations might require reference to developments at the level of several villages or the regional level.

A local-level of analysis has also been chosen because of the close observation and exploration it affords and the possibility of counteracting dominant established facts like the passiveness of women and discovering new trends or 'facts' (Harriss-White & Harriss, 2007). The research problem also required an investigation of the different social relations—within and outside the household—in which women are engaged. This could best be studied through a village approach. Finally, differentiation between hamlets/villages is likely and it was felt that these dimensions would be overlooked in a regional analysis. In addition to the detailed information that could be gathered at this level, it would also be easy to cross-check such information.

A question often raised with reference to micro-level fieldwork is the extent to which the findings can be generalised. It was decided that given the time and financial constraints, as well as the descriptive nature of research questions, an in-depth study focussing on just four villages would likely be possible and well suited for this work. By studying more than one village, the issue of representativity would be dealt with to some extent (Breman, 1989). Another point—as evident from the literature—is that there is quite a bit of variation within and amongst villages, and broad generalisations seem more likely than uniform facts. The strength of village-based studies has to be located in its critical exploration and description which lead to explaining the extent to which observed reality conforms or not to existing theory and literature (Harriss-White & Harriss, 2007).

Different methods were used to gather different types of information and to establish its reliability and validity. Though the main emphasis was on qualitative methods, the survey method was used in the field as well. Given below is an outline of various research tools used in the course of the fieldwork.

4.2.1. Fieldwork Methods

Initially, a study of four villages seemed possible in view of time limit, considering that I would be working alone and anticipating the time it would take me to get to the village and establish myself in the field. The fieldwork was started as soon as the first village was chosen and it was decided that the other three villages will be chosen in due process. However, the time taken to settle in the first village, complete the first two villages and then taking up a third village of over thousand households made studying a fourth village was not possible. So, three villages were studied. I was assisted by a Dusadh woman who was a resident of the first village. In all, I surveyed about twelve hundred households, collected sixty-nine oral histories and conducted seven focus-group discussions.

Data collection combined a number of methods: case study, village survey, participant observation, oral history and focus-group discussions. These methods were used flexibly in varying combinations, as required and depending upon village size and time constraints. The household survey was conducted in all villages. In the first and second village, oral histories were the main source of in-depth information on the specific question detailed previously. In the third village oral interviewing was combined with focus-group discussions in view of the village's vast area and time pressures.²⁵ Participant observation was of most significance in the first village where I resided for the entire duration of fieldwork. Due consideration was given to the sequencing of methods in the fieldwork plan. At the village level, the household survey was first administered. This gave the villagers and me time to get used to each other and to understand each other's dialects. It allowed me to familiarise myself with the village layout and identify willing respondents in the survey process. Only thereafter oral history interviewing was done.

²⁵ In this village, oral interviewing was not as extensive or in-depth as in the first two villages.

This research does not begin with a hypothesis, but with areas of enquiry which make it well suited for the **case study** method (Cousin, 2005). This method refers to an in-depth and thorough study of a unit i.e. the village here (Gerring, 2004). It is particularly suited to this research's exploratory (at least, initially) and descriptive nature of enquiry (Gerring, 2004; Cousin, 2005; George & Bennett, 2005). The process of describing the field site leads to a better understanding of the area and possibly new or more important areas of enquiry (Cousin, 2005). It is exploratory and broad questions imply a re-evaluation and refining of question in actually carrying out fieldwork (Cousin, 2005). It is difficult to say to what extent a case study can be compared with the macro level, but as in village study, its strength lies in evaluating the data vis-à-vis question raised, explaining differences and identifying areas for further research (Cousin, 2005).

The village **survey** intended to collect basic socio-economic information about the land position, caste configuration, listing each household member's paid/unpaid activities, forms and rates of remuneration for works undertaken. The questionnaire was administered to all households in the village (appendix 1). The questions were simply worded, open-ended, inviting subjective answers. The attempt was to have a female member as a respondent so that a note could be made on possible respondents for in-depth interviews for oral histories.

A problem encountered in the survey round was that women tended to discount a lot of work they did as unnecessary and not worthy of mention. This was either because these tasks were unpaid, household related or very irregular, for example, cutting grass, tending to livestock, being an occasional school cook. Underlying this hesitation was a strong internalisation of their gender role as being secondary and supplemental to that of the male head and the breadwinner of the house. Female labourers do not see their incomes or other activities not remunerated monetarily equally important in household reproduction. As such, in the initial stages, I had to be persistent and patient as I 'coaxed' things out of them; if I saw a goat at the house, I would ask who took it for grazing; if households owning cow, sell milk, who sold the milk; what did children do when women worked in the fields; in case of a dhobi household, if I saw an iron, I asked if they did ironing for outsiders and who did they

ironing primarily and who helped; if I saw a sewing machine, I asked if they occasionally sewed for the villagers and in exchange of what etc.?

In some cases where the respondent did not understand a question, this was illustrated with an example. Some were either unsure or unwilling to give honest or exact answers particularly where land was concerned. In these situations, they were asked to give a roundabout figure and this was easy to check in relation to the village pattern and the other specificities of household in terms of household occupational structure, possession of other assets and with other villagers. Initially, quite a few respondents were unwilling show their ration cards for fear that it would be taken away from them or they would be given another card on which they would not get as many benefits. It was realised during the course of the survey that some questions like duration of residency in the village or the timing of introduction of mechanisation in agriculture were difficult to establish because the concept of time is very complicated and the references are not in terms of year but in terms of major life changing events like marriage, death, village fire, year the crop was completely destroyed etc.

Participant observation is an ethnographic method, primarily used in the kind of everyday micro-level research proposed here (Roche, 1999). Participant observation is used for longer duration studies, requires the researcher to be based in the field for that time, engaging with village residents everyday and reflecting on these and their meanings (Ribbens & Edwards, 1998). Detailed daily field-notes are the most basic research tool used within this method and these maybe supplemented with audio/visual aids or other methods etc.

With the exception of the first village where I stayed for the whole fieldwork year, it was not so much as typical participant observation in the second and third village as just observation. I relied on very detailed field notes. No other aids like the camera were used since it made women very self-conscious. My daily observation of routine events allowed me to form an understanding of the socio-cultural norms, economic relations, the general power structure etc. This helped me to continuously refine and accordingly direct research questions. More importantly, all this then informed my interpretation of what was observed, allowed inclusion of diverse vantage-points, even if contradictory and minimise biases. My gender set some limits on my

participation. For example, I could not attend panchayat meeting which were attended by only men and often held behind closed doors. The same was the case with male gatherings at my host family's house, which dealt with village issues relating to land or elections. Usually these took place in their courtyard in the evenings. Female labourers often attended religious gatherings late at nights in other villages, but again my personal inhibitions and those of my host family meant that I could not partake in these. Once, on a festive occasion, I asked the female members of my host family to translate the songs being sung by women of labouring households, which we could clearly hear from our house. However, they refused and laughed it off, just telling me that they were bad.

The tradition of **oral history** includes different types of evidence—life histories, interviews, story telling—and here the focus was on life stories and interviews. The advantage of this method and the very reason for its use here is that it gives voice to the hitherto marginalised populations and by doing so, might disclose trends completely missed in the available literature and challenge preconceived impressions (Johnson, et al., 1982). Oral histories highlight the importance of a particular event, process or phenomenon for respondents (Portelli, 1998), with reference to their beliefs, interests, established norms and the wider social, economic and political setting in which they operate (Bevir, 2006; Jeffery & Jeffery, 1996). This method also makes for a dynamic process of enquiry, allowing women to revise their perspective with changes in their personal position or opinion vis-à-vis their 'environment' (Jeffery & Jeffery, 1996). Oral histories reflect diverse ways in which women experience deprivation, domination and humiliation (Sender, et al., 2006). The extent to which oral histories are illustrative of the interplay of class, caste and gender dynamics in a more general sense is a vexed issue, but then again representativeness here should be understood as 'a feature of social positions that are understood to be shared and collective' (Johnson, et al., 1982, p. 239).

Oral interviewing was structured but not rigid. In this method, the questions listed at the beginning of this chapter were asked. Though the basic structure was maintained throughout, different questions could be emphasised, depending upon the respondent (for example, whether an occasional or pure wage labourer). Other aspects could be included as well or redefined in accordance with emerging field findings. As indicated

earlier, during the survey round itself I took note of possible respondents, considering whether they did wage labour and to what extent which would be evident from their responses to the questionnaire. The attempt was to include women from different castes, hamlets and age groups. I also considered which hamlet or section of labourers should be focussed: 'pure' wage labourers and those closely integrated with the village's socio-economic sphere and these were often one and the same. After the survey round, I would approach them with interview requests. I also drew on my personal social networks. The purpose of the research and the type of questions to be asked were explained at the time of the survey and later again.

Most of the interviews lasted for six to seven hours and would usually conclude within a single day. In case of key informants, it took a couple of days. Detailed notes were taken during the course of interview itself. I did not make any audio or visual recording of these interviews. This was a conscious choice because I had noted that women tended to be shy and embarrassed to be caught on film doing menial tasks. Also, I could only understand the dialect in the context or setting. It would take me a couple of days or so to pick it up every time I returned after a break, but there was no way that I could transcribe recorded interviews weeks or months after they took place or even understand them. Since 'jumping topics' was common, it would be difficult to make sense of interviews later and these would have to be put in some sort of an order and the reference of certain assertions be explained. The interviews were conducted in a mix of the local Bhojpuri (mostly) dialect and Hindi (in cases of upper caste-class) but they were written as it is in English, with some original text retained. Where I was unsure of a particular meaning, I asked the same thing in different ways again and again till I was sure. I also noted women's changing expressions, assertions, tone of voice etc. One implication of this method was that the oral histories could not be written verbatim or in the first person, which would have indeed made for a stronger presentation of the evidence.

Important questions were asked more than once in different ways as a self-check mechanism. At times this led to contesting information and the attempt was to resolve any confusion then itself. On few occasions, interviews had to be abandoned or wrapped up quickly because of the unwillingness of the respondent, work or family pressure or the very poor quality of data. The place of interview was left to the

respondent to choose depending on her comfort level. Most were conducted at home (where women did house work as well in between) or on the village border on '*chabutra*' (platform) where some women would do threshing. In the latter case, we would often be joined by other women and this would lead to illuminating discussions on whatever the respondent and I happened to talk about. This also served to clarify and check the information collected. The mode of enquiry was informal and flexible, moving from the general to specific. Questions were open-ended inviting descriptions, explanations and opinions. Respondents were encouraged to narrate specific examples.

Focus group discussions were employed in the third village to obtain views of many people together in an interpersonal setting.²⁶ Not only was this more efficient in terms of time and money, but an interactive session also afforded insights into how interpersonal relations and underlying power relations shaped peoples' opinions and assertions (Roche, 1999). Interaction among the respondents provided new and/or comprehensive information which could be verified at the same time (Roche, 1999). The size of groups varied between ten to thirty women (few men would join us in between), usually from the same caste and hamlet.²⁷ In this village, both the survey and focus group discussions were simultaneously done. Often, a discussion was a natural progression from the survey; as I sat filling up the survey sheet in a household, the natural curiosity and a desire to be included (and of course to check out a single woman who was so different from them in talking, behaviour, attire etc), neighbours would turn up at the respondent's house. A village's 'open door policy' was also advantageous in this sense. We would generally chat and after some time, I would request if they acquiesce to a discussion. Many of my questions would have already been discussed in the natural order of conversation.

Focus Group Discussions were conducted at any open place outside the immediate cluster of huts or at the home of the survey respondent. Though spontaneous, the questionnaire was followed but not in a strict order of questions. It was common for

²⁶ A couple or so of these were done in the second village also, but these were not the main source of information in that case.

²⁷ Since, several women would express antagonistic feelings towards other caste women, employers and labourers, I did not try to bring together mixed caste groups. Where this was the case, it was not deliberate, the women (in a minority) were from usually the same hamlet and shared neighbourhood ties which, as we will see, underline work relations as well.

one or two women to take the lead, but attempt was made to include all and even ask direct questions to some. In this context, focus group discussions pose the danger that existing power relations maybe reinforced between employers and labourers and among the labourers themselves.

This thesis relies heavily on ‘thick description’ i.e. not just stating what is observed but elucidating its context to make it meaningful, for the same action can mean different things depending upon the setting (Geertz, n.d.). Informal resources like conversations were also relied upon as these help in assessing the impact of changed circumstances on collected data and in the case of women these are a valuable source of information. Qualitative methods as described are susceptible to criticisms on grounds of lacking systematic study and objectivity. Since this research deals with individuals, the extent to which it can be structured and pre-planned depends on practical considerations and circumstances existing in the field at that time. This does not mean that a logical and coherent work strategy was not possible at all. On objectivity, attempt was made to clearly state any prejudices before hand, to include different types of respondents and to cross-check information with key informants.

The nature of this research and given that methods were not uniformly applied across the villages, the quality of information collected also varied. For example, in my host family, I was able to observe first hand intra-household relations, but this was not the case in other villages. In other words, the nature and depth of evidence varied from village to village. There are areas where information is problematic or not much can be read into it and the evidence is weak. Then there are some examples which are stand alone cases but are central to the argument. At times, I struggled to relate empirical evidence with my preconceived notions and categorise it in accordance to concepts I was working with. For example, why did the biggest landowners of the area live in a dilapidated house or why did they not reflect in diversification of crops that could be exported to other regions rather than only growing sugarcane which was then given to mills?

Having laid out the research questions and the methods used for data collection, the following outlines the selection of the fieldwork district and villages.

4.3. Selection of Fieldwork District and Villages

The fieldwork was carried out over a period of one year from September 2009 to September 2010. The first task was to select a district in east UP. The first two months were given to this, the selection of villages and organising the actual fieldwork i.e. delineating key contacts in the field, deciding on a place of stay etc. The next six months or so the fieldwork was carried out in the villages. Towards the end, follow-up work and revisits to the villages were carried out.

The first task was to select the district and villages. Consultations were held with academicians, institutions and organisations working on the area, government officials, local activists, prominent local persons etc. For discussions with various scholars I was either based in Delhi or Lucknow as required. In Lucknow, consultations were held with Professor R.K. Dixit, Department of Political Science, University of Lucknow; Professor D.M. Diwakar, Giri Institute of Development Studies; Ms. Arundhati Dhuru, a social activist who worked in eastern UP region and was an advisor to Supreme Court on MGNREGA and food security; and her husband, Mr. Sandeep Pandey, an activist with wide field experience, including in eastern UP. In Delhi, consultations were held with few faculty members of the Jawaharlal Nehru University—Professor Sudha Pai from the Centre for Political Studies, Professor Ravi Srivastava from the Centre for the Study of Regional Development and Dr. Vikas Rawal from the Centre for Economic Studies and Planning. Government publications like the Statistical Abstract of UP (2008) and the District-wise Development Indicators (2008) were also looked at.

In all consultations, the research project was briefly explained. Information was sought on their fieldwork experience and about the region generally, indicators to be considered in the process of site selection, suggestions on relevant districts and other important sources of information, possible contacts etc. These consultations provided an overall picture of the region overall and a sense of what to expect in the field. Possible criterion for the selection of the district that came up included employment and crop patterns, landholding structure, social composition and the level of agricultural development. Once a district would be finalised, the level of enquiry would shift to the district and block level.

From the start, I wanted to concentrate on just one district. I anticipated some delay in getting to start district-level work because I would have to first convince my very urban and upper middle class family to actually let me go and thereafter, it would take me some time as well to get used to a 'rural way of life'. As such, I did not want to spend undue time on making different living and travel arrangements for every district. Since I am from Lucknow, I did not want to pick a district too close to home to avoid family pressures or clash of interests. Therefore, from the outset itself, Basti, Faizabad and Devipatan divisions (all less than 200km from Lucknow) were not considered.

The districts under the remaining five divisions (Allahabad, Azamgarh, Gorakhpur, Varanasi and Vindhyachal), were looked into greater detail in terms of data on main crop, landholding size, irrigation structure, concentration of scheduled caste population and number of female labourers.²⁸ The last two criteria were decisive in the sense that the other indicators showed similar trends in all districts i.e. rice, wheat, sugarcane are the dominant crops, tube-well irrigation (mainly private) is common, as is the average landholding size which is less than one hectare in most cases (GoUP, 2008) Rural scheduled caste population was high in the districts of Gorakhpur, Pratapgarh. Sonbhadra, Fatehpur and Kushinagar (appendix 2). Female agricultural labourers were concentrated in Kushinagar, Maharajganj, Gorakhpur, Pratapgarh and Siddharthnagar (appendix 2).

Several other factors influenced district selection. Since the literature available on eastern UP drew on south-east districts, a conscious attempt was made to pick a district which would not only be relevant but one on which an original contribution could be made. Then there were districts (Ghazipur, Mirzapur and Chandauli) where left-oriented movements were/are dominant. These were discounted as they are

²⁸ A district with paddy cultivation would be preferable since paddy involved greater female labour. Ideally, the land structure should include some big, medium and small holdings so as to be able to capture the entire range of wage labour relations. At the same time, presence of small holdings was important for they can be seen as a proxy for land fragmentation, less landlessness and greater possibility of 'classes of labour'. Irrigation structure could be an important determinant of labour relations if labourers had to hire in private tube-wells from their employers. The greater the concentration of dalit population and female labourers in a district, the better it would be for research.

largely not perceived to be representative of the eastern UP region. The districts of Azamgarh and Mau were not considered for safety issues. Finally, practical considerations and a district on which I would have less ‘trouble’ convincing my family also dictated my choice. In the end, I decided to visit Gorakhpur and Kushinagar for not only were they relevant but I had managed to locate some contacts in these districts who could help me with the initial village visits.

In the second phase, block and village level visits were undertaken in Gorakhpur and Kushinagar districts. In Gorakhpur, I spoke with two faculty members at the Gorakhpur University: one of whom was a big landowner but not forthcoming with any relevant details. The other, who had kindly helped with my visit arrangements, was not originally from the city and therefore was unable to shed much light on agrarian issues or provide any contacts.²⁹ In the event, I only managed to briefly visit one village and speak with some villagers. The Kushinagar visit was much more fruitful.³⁰

In my first visit to Kushinagar, I visited four villages and conducted informal group interviews in dalit hamlets of these villages. However, the downside of having a tie-up with an activist group (through which this visit was arranged) was that they took me to villages where they had an established presence and tended to steer the conversation in the direction they wanted, to their struggles alongside labourers (though not de-linked from my interest areas). Female labourers depicted an unusually significant level of awareness and it almost seemed that they had practised what to say when. Nonetheless, these visits were very productive in terms of data and I was very eager to start fieldwork in this district itself. Not only did it qualify on research criteria, but I now also had possible sites to choose from.

However, there were two problems which made this choice unlikely. First, I was increasingly weary of being closely attached with the activists. By extension, this would put me in an unfavourable position vis-à-vis the ‘other’ i.e. the upper caste-

²⁹ Mr. Rushiram from the Political Science Department of the Gorakhpur University had helped with all the arrangements, facilitated my meeting with the other person. Since, neither one of us had any contact or other source of accessing a village, we just asked the car driver to take us to his village.

³⁰ This part of the visit was organised with the help of Mr Sandeep Pandey and the Kushinagar team of his organisation, the Asha Parivar.

class employers and labourers (dalit and non-dalits) in those hamlets of these villages where these activist were not involved and consequently the residents of these hamlets had remained excluded from the beneficial outcomes of labour struggles. It was apparent that these activists-cum-social workers were from a comparatively privileged background, for example, one was a journalist, one a lawyer and one was pursuing higher studies. Though they espoused the cause of labourers, they were not cultivators themselves (and very possibly landowners) and a visit to one of their houses' gave me the chance to see that the women in their families also were subject to socio-cultural restrictions, unlike the very vocal and visible female labourers in the villages we visited.³¹ There was a certain give and take involved as well. For example, Mr. Sandeep Pandey called on me to note the proceedings of a conference in Lucknow and once, to transcribe some notes. I must stress though, that both he and his wife shared valuable information, experience and were instrumental in introducing me to my host family.

The second big hurdle was the lack of long-term accommodation. While in Kushinagar I scouted some places to stay in the villages I visited and even in the district. The district was actually a road with one government guest house, a couple of expensive hotels, *dharamshalas* to which I had no access and many religious sites.³² The public guest house and the hotels remain pretty much empty in the non-tourist season: the main street starts emptying at about five in the evening and soon after no one, let alone a woman, can be seen. A couple of people offered accommodation in their houses, these were not deemed suitable. For one thing, neither had proper functioning toilets within the house boundary and this was something I was unwilling to compromise on. They also would not accept money from me and I would most definitely be an economic burden on their already stretched means. Fortunately, the next time I visited Kushinagar, I stayed with a Rajput family and this arrangement worked out very well. This time, I visited four other blocks either independently or with the eldest son of my host family. During the course of my meetings with block

³¹ At one time, while I was having breakfast and the activists were in my room, I found on my return, that someone had gone through my things.

³² The district offices are located in another block which earlier was the district headquarter. I was told that given the symbolism of Kushinagar for Buddhism, Mayawati shifted district title to Kushinagar when she came to power.

officers, I also incidentally met a *pradhan*, a *panchayat* secretary, a project director (district level) or some social worker who happened to be present.

These meetings and interviews in the first Kushinagar visit, confirmed the broad trends that the literature review had indicated, for instance, regarding female labour being agricultural and male out-migration. The Rajput family had offered to let me stay in their house if I were to study their village. Since, I had no other viable option forthcoming, I decided to take up the offer and start fieldwork.³³ Time was an issue and I also knew that living with a big and prominent family, with some members well settled in Lucknow, would go down a long way with convincing my family. In addition to basic amenities, it was essential that the family could ‘afford’ me—inside the village there were hardly any places to eat out daily if I did not have a full set-up and I actually hardly saw women going out to the market independently without any essential work purpose. This family did not accept any rent from me, but I helped the women with domestic chores, took them for occasional visits to Gorakhpur and we travelled together to and fro from Lucknow in my car whenever I visited home.

In the course of doing fieldwork in this village, I learnt of two nearby villages, one which had a significant Chamar population and the other famous for its political activism, and I decided to cover these as well. Over time, my host family and I grew close and they were willing to let me stay on till the time my work ended. This was convenient since I could easily walk to the other villages, my host family’s name facilitated introduction to villagers (albeit a hesitant one initially) and participant observation was an added benefit in the first village. Together, the three villages provided a variety of different social configurations, a broader range of employment patterns, political awareness and evidence of labour struggles. At the same time, I could see that the labourers and employers of these three villages shared overlapping socio-economic relations to varying degrees. So, Kushinagar it was.

³³ All three fieldwork villages are census villages. The Census of India defines a village as having a population of less than five thousand, where the majority of the male working population is engaged in agriculture and with population density is less than 400 per sq. km. (NSSO, 2001).

4.3.1. Kushinagar: An Introduction

Kushinagar, a north-eastern district of Uttar Pradesh was carved out of Deoria district in 1994. Kushinagar is a major Buddhist pilgrimage site, where Buddha died and is said to have attained *parinirvana* (nirvana) (Sengupta, 2007). No gazetteer exists on Kushinagar and there is only one on Deoria from the 1970s (Varun, 1976). The brief description is based on fieldwork and government publications (GoUP, 2008a, 2008b, 2008c) and the district website.

Comprising fourteen blocks, Kushinagar has primarily an agrarian economy. Sugarcane, maize and paddy are main Kharif crops and pulses mustard, barley and wheat are the main Rabi crops. Several crops are grown in one season, though rice and wheat are the main crops. Sugarcane is the main cash crop, though it was noticed in another block that banana was cultivated as well and exported to other regions. In fact, a landowner from the block had even won a medal for the banana quality. High yield variety seeds, chemical fertilizers and pesticides are available from government and private outlets. They are used extensively, particularly by the upper caste-classes. Households also grow seasonal fruits and vegetables.

Agriculture is irrigated. The studied area is not dependent on rain completely. But in certain crops like wheat not as much artificial application of water is required as in the case of paddy which requires good irrigation and a good monsoon. However, small and marginal farmers cannot afford to rent in tube-wells on the scale required, so a good monsoon is particularly important for them.³⁴ Canals and private tube-wells are the most important sources of irrigation.³⁵ Agricultural machinery like tractors, harrow and cultivator sets are common. Combine harvesters are used by the big farmers. Implements like spade, hoe, sickle, plough are very common.

Mechanization depends upon class status and landholding size. Among large landowners, agricultural operations like harvesting and threshing and preparing the field for planting are predominantly mechanised. In a few cases of large landowners, a

³⁴ Some have boreholes in their field and rent in only a pump-set and pipe. Others have to rent the use of tube-wells. The most common source are the upper caste-classes.

³⁵ Canal water is directed in the fields through irrigation channels. Water reaches those who are closer to canal and on plain area. Those with holding in higher land do not get benefit.

small area of the field may be manually harvested and threshed because the straw is retained and used as animal fodder or in cases where the land size is uneconomical for mechanization. Harvesting and threshing is mostly manually undertaken among small and marginal farmers. Socio-economic status and the availability of male family members for operations like ploughing, may also influence mechanization. Upper caste small or marginal farmers are unlikely to cultivate their land. They either lease out land or hire labourers and use a tractor. Dalit small or marginal farmers may be forced to hire labourers or rent a tractor for digging, turning soil, levelling or making rows for plantation in the absence of available male family labour. However, tractor ploughing is now increasingly common even among small and marginal farmers.

There is a sugarcane research centre at Seorahi block. There are several sugar mills and jaggery crushers in the district.³⁶ The labour market is dominated by agricultural wage labour. Brick kilns are very common. Petty businesses, migrant work and casual wage labour are some other types of employment. Local manufacture of alcohol is another business. Livestock rearing is a common household activity. Village and supra-village labour markets are gender and caste-class segregated. This will become clearer with field findings in the following two chapters.

These economic features are seen across the three villages studied.

4.4. Doing Fieldwork

No matter how much one plans for fieldwork, formulates back-up plans and reads up on methodological literature, fieldwork is a lot about spontaneity and adapting to conditions existing on ground. Coming from a privileged lifestyle and with no research experience, for me it was also about whether I would be able to adjust to living in a village, overcome my inhibitions and model my behaviour in accordance with what would be expected. Fieldwork turned out to be a ‘mixed bag’, a on-the-job learning process.

³⁶ Jaggery is unrefined sugar

When one starts fieldwork, it is with great anticipation and a naïve belief that things would proceed smoothly after all the planning. If only. I was excited but also doubtful of myself, so much so that I got a friend along for the very first visit. When we reached Gorakhpur at five one morning, the share-taxi ride to Kushinagar was a harrowing experience with us literally squashed with some thirty other people in the jeep and my friend literally half out of the jeep. We were dropped off at the main Kushinagar cross-road, only to discover that the 'district headquarter' was a winding road with an assemblage of temples and small shops on one side and one very sleepy office and a government tourist guest house on the other side. The person who was supposed to have booked his office's guest house for us was unavailable and when we reached the complex, we were turned away from outside. We took a room in the other guest house, where we were the only visitors as it turned out. Furthermore, the person who was supposed to show me around was out of town. So, the first day we literally walked up and down the street thinking of what could be possibly done. We could not but help noticing that we were the only 'unaccompanied' women on that stretch of road. We just 'walked in' to a village next to the guest house and spent a couple of hours there talking with some residents. We even asked an employee of the guest-house to show us his village, which was nearby: he even agreed, but then disappeared until the next day.

With our 'contacts', we later visited four villages. It took a while getting used to someone else planning the day and simply letting us know of it. So what if it was my fieldwork and had I not read before hand about possible problems and adjustments that would be required? I discovered that reading and actually having to experience it are different things. Every moment in the field could not be productive. I also developed 'counter-strategies' along the way. For example, if the contact people tended to take control of conversation and prompt certain responses, I would ask the women to show me their huts and then speak to them inside their house, the domain of the women and exclusively family members. In Gorakhpur, we met with an academic-cum-big landowner, who stressed on the problems with labour and the 'system'. When I had settled on Kushinagar as the field district and started visiting block offices. The officials were mostly helpful. At times, block officers would try to procrastinate and ask me to come back later. I would then turn up before our fixed time and wait till they would see me.

What about my caste and gender? With regard to the former, there was some ambiguity in the villages where I worked. The caste I belong to, is not found in the region and in fact, I did not come across a single household of the same caste. I was unable to elaborate on my caste status other than identify it and classify it as an upper caste. The high castes familiar to the villagers were Brahmin, Rajputs, Bhumiars and often they would ask my field assistant how my caste ranked in comparison to these castes. My field assistant would always emphasise that it was the 'highest' caste. Initially, women would not let me sit beside them but within the first couple of weeks or so, I established a good rapport with them and such issues rarely came up then. Women also tended to take a parental attitude towards me, a young and single woman whose parents had sent her so far to study. They considered it their duty to help me. Women valued education very highly. They were at ease talking about 'women's issues' with me.

My being a woman was a disadvantage as well. Places like the village market, a veritable source of information and networking or simply interacting with men was automatically closed to me or unless I was approached by a man himself (which rarely happened). I wore traditional clothes and though I never went anywhere without a scarf, I did not cover my head and this was fine for an unmarried lady. I don't think I spent five minutes with a woman without being asked one of the three questions, directly or through my field assistant: did I have any brothers, why is my nose not pierced and my marital status. At times, I was subjected to some very personal questions and remarks, which made me uncomfortable. I was a constant source of amazement and curiosity to them initially for I looked, spoke, behaved and wore differently, and most unusually was so educated and still studying.³⁷ They often said that in their *biradri* (caste or community) no one had *buddhi* (sense) to be like me and that is why they were the way they were.

In my host-family household, I was expected to seek permission from the male head of the household if I wanted to go outside the village or indirectly approach him through his wife. I was expected home by a certain time. All household women wore

³⁷ In fact, so 'foreign' was I to them in the beginning that they thought a visiting Norwegian (fair, blonde and blue eyed) friend and I were sisters!

saris (but they wore suits in Lucknow), spoke softly, did not answer back to elder male members etc. I noted that my host family served people in different utensils depending upon their religion and caste. Non-vegetarian food was not cooked inside the house and utensils for this were stored separately (Muslims could be served in these utensils). But they did not follow these practices in their Lucknow house. These issues were not really unanticipated since I am a 'local'. Perhaps, what I found more difficult to deal with was things that one takes for granted: electricity, running and heated water, speaking one's own mind without a second thought, free to go anywhere. The idea of restricted mobility, either because of socio-cultural sanctions or because there actually is nowhere to go in a village is more suffocating than the actual fact of it, at least for me. This could be really demoralising when fieldwork is not going well. There were times, when though surrounded by people, I had difficulty relating to them and found research work isolating in the midst of many.

Choosing where to stay during the course of fieldwork is an important decision with significant possible ramification (Sharma, 1978; Breman, 1985). My host family was the biggest landowner in the village so naturally, women were hesitant to say anything bad about them. It did not take long for them to open up to me though. By the time I finished the survey round, trust was not an issue. There was no turning incident, rather quite a smooth transition. Two factors helped here. One thing that perhaps put labourers at ease was that I could be critical (not openly) of my host family, since I would commiserate with labourers on their low wages. Secondly, my field assistant's presence undoubtedly put them at comfort. Her presence with me as I undertook the survey or did interviews meant that we were perceived as confidants, friends and often I picked up very important snippets of information in her conversation with others which were then built upon.

The big landowners were another story. My host family members were my key informants and helped in understanding the local terminology. However, on the very first day itself I was asked not to visit the pradhan and a well off dalit house. The pradhan (Ahir) and my host family are political and economic rivals. With the other household, it appeared to be a case of economic jealousy primarily. In time, I did visit this household, without my host family's knowledge and taking in confidence my field assistant. However, she herself did not come inside their house with me. She

could not afford to antagonise her major employers from whom she had borrowed as well. I could not visit the pradhan's house however. As the political and an economic hub of the village, there are always people milling around the pradhan's house, making it difficult to approach it without bringing attention to one self. In due course, the wife (who was actually the pradhan) of the male head of the household (the proxy pradhan) did interact with me, but this was rare and nothing much could be made of these passing conversations. On my first day in the second village, I was called by the pradhan's wife, who was sitting at her door step. The house was one of first few at the village entrance. I explained my purpose, we spoke at length and I surveyed their house then itself. Their response regarding wages were much inflated, as I discovered in due course. The pradhan, fearing the consequences once the true wage rates were known after the village survey and given that this was the election year, complained to the male head of my host family to whom he was distantly related. Fortunately, my host family realised this and did not put any restrictions on me in this case.

An inherent danger is how quickly a situation can flare up, without any seeming provocation. In one household (upper caste-class), an elder female member was the respondent. Midway through the survey, her daughter joined us. I again explained my research and its purpose and she seemed fine with it. We left after the survey as we sat doing the survey in the next household, we could hear the daughter shouting at her mother and she also slapped her. There was not much I could do. I had not forced them to participate. The same day I visited the elder woman again, outside her house and apologised. Many days later her daughter called me into her house and introduced me to her visiting son (the male head of the household), to explain what I did and why. The son was an educated businessman who understood and thereafter 'peace' seemed to prevail. This also showed how important male sanction was.

Undoubtedly, the role of the research assistant was central to the fieldwork progress. However, her position was not so simple. The fact that she was willing to work with me for long hours, travel outside the village boundaries and interact with outsiders (men and women) was a courageous act since it challenged the rigid traditional restrictions on mobility and social interactions imposed on her. No doubt there was the aspect of remuneration which was comparatively much better and would ease some economic hardship. Nonetheless, it is highly doubtful that she would have done

this if not for her husband's permission and the 'request' of my host family. I would always pick her up from her hut at the start of the day, leave her till her house on her return and in between I made sure that we always stuck together. She would also ensure this because otherwise her 'character' would be questioned-what was a young woman doing by herself in another village, interacting with outsiders and without any express work purpose? She was very particular about how she dressed, as well. Working with me gave her an opportunity to wear good clothes. Not only should she put her best foot forward, but her husband and other villagers otherwise taunt her if she dressed up. Once when the second village's pradhan offered us water in steel glasses and my field assistant was asked her caste, she claimed to be an Ahir. She felt shy telling that she was a Dusadh because she had been served in a steel glass. She even asked me not to tell anyone in 'our' village.

On the other hand, her relationship with me also made her more susceptible to exploitation by my host family. To understand this, it has to be noted first that she was not a typical fieldwork assistant, hired to interpret or collect data. She started with me at the behest of the host family who asked her to show me around the village and introduce me. Initially, she also helped to interpret the local dialect. Since the arrangement was working well, I asked her if she wished to work with me regularly. She was indebted to the host family, expected to provide priority and unpaid labour services. It took much persuasion from me to get her to accept a small amount of remuneration for working with me. Nonetheless, it was a scandalous amount for a local female labourer to earn. My host family tried to dissuade me. The field assistant was a target of snide comments by the host family and the villagers.

In addition to putting in a full day's work with me, the host family expected her to do certain things for them (and more so now that she was earning 'well'). During harvest and otherwise as well, she had to get up very early to take care of her domestic responsibilities and work in her field. If I were to suggest going alone, she would be very offended. She fell back on her exchange labour relations commitments, which once led to an ugly verbal fight between her and another female labourer. I once got her a sari from Lucknow and from then on she would occasionally express her desire for material things, but never ask me directly for anything. In due course, a close relationship between her and me also meant that often she (as well as other villagers

of the first village) would expect things from me which I could not fulfil and this would again temporarily strain relations between us, for instance, in situations where I was seen as a possible source of credit and urban employment.

Moving on to other issues, I was unable to gain historically grounded explanations for the caste based spatial organisation of the village or changes been in land relations, as originally intended. Rather, I provide a snapshot of main social and economic relations. These processes had unfolded much before the 1990s whereas majority of the respondents became residents of the village post marriage. Few of the older residents and some respondents did provide some insights but these are very limited, expressed as vague recollections and therefore, not very reliable. Also, it should be recalled that the main informants of this study were women and traditionally women (particularly young women) have been excluded from involvement in key household social and economic decisions as on land, marriage and participation in local political institutions. This was observed in the process of fieldwork as well and there was only so much that women could elaborate on these specific issues.

Similarly, where developments in agriculture were concerned, respondents were unable to elaborate on processes like the shifts in production processes and accumulation strategies over the years but could substantively expand on mechanisation and declining labour absorption, changed cropping pattern, increasing cost of cultivation, fragmentation of land and other relevant aspects which directly impacted them. Women would not provide information on lease arrangements since these were considered to be temporary and not their own land. I also found it difficult to explain what I meant by lease until I picked up the local terms. At times, the survey information would not match the information from interviews and again had to be cross-checked. In few cases, the data could not be used. If women of one household had fought on the day of my visit, they would insist that I represent them as separate household. There was also a realization that being counted as separate meant separate BPL cards, MGNREGA jobs cards, IAY money etc.³⁸ It was difficult to categorise older people in terms of household because they alternated between their children's houses, depending upon with whom they got along for the moment.

³⁸ Under the Indira Awaas Yojna (IAY), the government provides a house construction allowance in the name of a woman or in joint name.

Another problem was that the government system of caste classification did not capture the local reality. For example, in the first village, one household claimed its *jati* as Rajput, but at the same time, described itself as Bhumihar. This is problematic because traditionally the term Bhumihar is understood as referring to Brahmins who took to cultivating land themselves. However, they were classified as Rajputs since that is what they claimed despite my clarifications and explanations. Another problem related to the use of surnames that masked internal differentiation among *jatis*. For example, Gupta is an upper-caste surname. But it is used by different *jatis* like Baniya, Raunihar or Teli. Depending on this, the official classification would differ—Telis are OBC and the rest, General. Some households just identified themselves as Gupta and were classified as General caste.³⁹ Then there were cases, where respondents differentiated between Brahmins and Bhumihars, Brahmins and Pandits and Rajputs and Thakurs. The safest option, as well as one that correctly represented the households, was to classify castes as per their local perception and not try and fit them under government categories. The reason for this disjuncture was referred to in the second chapter (see p.54).

A similar problem was encountered in how to present the evidence on landownership structure. Where jointed have households divided, it was common for them to have distributed the land among themselves even though the title may not have been legally transferred. Each household cultivates its share. In a few cases where jointed households have separated but have not distributed the land among them, land is cultivated jointly and there are various arrangements on how the produce is shared.⁴⁰ However, in both cases, each household has an independent kitchen and comes across as an independent socio-economic unit in all other respects.⁴¹ Therefore it made sense

³⁹ Irrespective of *jati* differences, 'Gupta' households displayed similar economic and cultural characteristics. For example, whether upper caste or OBC, Gupta households are likely to be engaged in own agriculture only; undertake some petty business; and Gupta women practice seclusion as do the women of Rajput households, but to a lesser extent, for instance, they may go to the field to supervise or pay the labourers.

⁴⁰ It is difficult to indicate a single pattern regarding the share of each in cultivation and produce which appears to fluctuate with independent circumstances like size of family; family members available for cultivation; if the family is migrant or not and if migrating is their share kept to be collected later on their return or is there a money arrangement between them regarding inputs made and crop sold on their behalf.

⁴¹ The Census of India takes an independent kitchen as an identification of one household. The same is done here.

to list them as separate entities and present the evidence as representative of ground realities regarding land ownership as opposed to legal ownership. The landholding status of parent and new households was accordingly tabulated i.e. the original landholding size is equally divided between the parent and the new households formed from it.

These dynamics, though confusing, had to be taken in stride and often the underlying reasons were illuminating.

Among other things, debates on ethics in social science research have been centred on elucidating the purpose of research and seeking informed consent of research participants; protecting the identity of the researched; not engaging in exploitation; thinking through the effects of leaving the field and relations build during the course of fieldwork, particularly in terms of consequences for those who participated in the research; and finally, making the researcher's position and biases explicit (Simpson, 2008).

While these debates served as guidelines for fieldwork, it is evident from preceding discussion that practical concerns about the then situation, the choices available and my positioning significantly shaped my actions.

Where the households or individual respondents did not wish to participate in the survey or interview, they were not forced.⁴² Most did not express the wish to remain anonymous and in fact stressed that their names be mentioned and particularly their caste status, though this could be more in the hope of receiving benefits. There is always the dilemma of how to reciprocate to the participants, whether monetary payment is justified or not? In some cases I did pay a very tiny amount for tea and tobacco, as asked by the participants themselves. But this was not commonly disclosed. I have already explained the 'give and take' relationship with the group of activists who initially helped me and my host family. On one occasion my host family asked for their resident village survey data and I did provide them with a sanitised

⁴² In the first village, those living near the pradhan, were especially reluctant to participate in oral histories. These households were of Ahir caste and only occasionally did wage labour, mainly for the pradhan.

version. I did not ever lie about my research objective or purpose and was very frank that this would not benefit them but nonetheless, the respondents continued to think that I was a government official on a surprise inspection, that the government was undertaking a survey and some benefit would follow from this or that I would return and help them secure jobs and better wages once I got a job after finishing studies and so on.

Finally, it should be noted that agriculture itself has not been the subject of study here. Though the study takes agriculture as an entry point, my concern is with female rural labourers who also happen to be predominantly agricultural wage labourers operating within an agrarian village economy. Agriculture is dealt with only to this extent. This thesis is not about the production cycles, estimating yields or income etc. With a research objective such as this, it is but natural that one perspective (focus on labour) is highlighted more than others, as will become clear in the following chapters. Moreover, indeed there could be aspects in rural labour relations that do not figure strongly in this work. The strength of this thesis lies in building a narrative in a much under researched region and with respect to those whose voice has been increasingly subsumed or marginalised in dominant literature.

Chapter 5

An Insiders' View into Sapatganj and Baaspur⁴³

This chapter will describe the findings from the first two villages, Sapatganj and Baaspur. The chapter is organised in the following manner. The first section will provide a socio-economic snapshot of the villages. The second section describes female rural labour relations, in the case of dalits labourers. The third section is concerned with the struggles of female labourers and their understanding of the political.

5.1. A Socio-Economic Profile of the Villages

This is done by way of looking at the spatial organisation, caste and religion composition, landownership structure and occupational patterns of the villages. In relevant literature a common observation is that the physical layout of a village is a reflection of the dominant social relations, clustering of caste group together an important axis for formation of work groups, of labour arrangements and labour struggles. Therefore, it is useful to see how space is organised in villages and whether or not it is an organising principle in socio-economic and political relations.

It is only by looking at caste and religious composition, land relations and occupational structure together can one answer who does what, who are the classes of labour and what do they do, what is the landholding pattern, who are the dominant castes and classes, is there a caste-class overlap, to what extent does occupational diversification exist etc. This knowledge constitutes an important background, a necessary means to study rural low caste and especially dalit female labour relations; the latter cannot be undertaken without establishing who the classes of labour, their caste and religious composition and what so female members of these households do? In sum: this section provides a general overview of the village area and the main aspects of existing social and economic relations amongst the various classes. Aspects

⁴³ Sentences paraphrased in English are in italics. Quotes, translated from Hindi-Bhojpuri, are put in quotation marks.

of village economy were already indicated in the previous chapter (pg. 17-18). After the discussion on occupational patterns, some concluding general statements are made.

5.1.1. Socio-Religious Composition and the Spatial Pattern

First, a brief note on how caste is perceived and closely linked to class status and the pervasiveness of the two together in routine lives of classes of labour.

The second chapter (pg.54) mentioned the divergence between official terminology on caste and caste as a lived experience. While all SCs are dalits, not all of them are perceived as equally unclean or untouchable. This is the case in both villages. Caste is understood and expressed as *jati* (see pg.38) which frames the everyday understanding and practises. *Jati* is immediately a marker of one's low caste touchable or untouchable status.⁴⁴ This then mediates one's engagement in and norms of behaviour in the village society. For example, SC women have a greater freedom of movement and are more outspoken (publicly and within the house), in comparison to Rajput women who are not to be seen or heard. SCs are served in separate utensils and cannot access certain parts of upper caste houses like the kitchen or the hand-pump inside the house. Their untouchability limits their work options because they cannot do domestic or any work that would bring them in direct touch with the upper castes.

Identification with the government system of caste classifications is limited to the extent of few knowing how their caste is now named in the central OBC or state SC lists. For example, it was pointed out by some respondents that Dusadhs are notified as Paswans, Kamkars as Kharwars in the state SC list, while Koeris are noted as Khushwahas in the Central OBC List. There is no recognition of or association with the term dalit. Dalits identify themselves as *chutka* (explained below) or harijan i.e. meaning 'children of God'. It was coined by Gandhi to refer to the untouchables.

⁴⁴ Similarly, among the OBCs, there are castes like the Jats who are not backward, but their inclusion in the OBC list entitles them to benefits like the reservation policy. The 'creamy layer' in the OBC category has been a subject of contentious debate.

However, for convenience sake, I will use the term dalit rather than SC⁴⁵ henceforth and also it is this term that I asked villagers about. Lack of familiarity with political and legal terminology does not mean that dalits are not aware of the practical implications of their categorisation. For example, women pointed out that the pradhan's seat could be reserved for *chutka* or a woman or could be unreserved. This awareness however, is limited. Female labourers explained this as one of the ways in which the government tries to help *chutkas*. Though right, there is no understanding of this as an administrative measure consciously designed for their political empowerment or fiscal devolution.

In Sapatganj and Baaspur, caste is also the basic medium of aligning oneself with a political party, irrespective of its ideology. This is particularly the case for women belonging to the classes of labour category. They do not know what BSP is or what is the party's political manifesto, but they are very familiar with the popular BSP leader Mayawati and her administration's pro-dalit attitude and policies, for example, in accessing police or block officials or provision of school scholarships.

Caste consciousness is intertwined with class consciousness. This will become explicit later, but it suffices to say that this is based on empirical reality. The upper castes are the most landed and therefore with economic clout, given that they are the most important source of employment for female labourers. They are also politically very well-connected which makes them influential in the villages, for example, as a medium of accessing public resources or mediating in a dispute. On the other hand, the dalits are either landless or overwhelmingly marginal landowners, with no economic or political clout and are dependent on the former for employment, for mediating bank loans, court cases, accessing public provisions etc. This is not to say that there is no internal differentiation within castes, but in everyday lives of villagers, no distinction is made between caste and class status. *Badkas* are the upper caste-class and *chutkas* are the lower caste-class.⁴⁶ Their expressions and explanations of various

⁴⁵ A few well to do dalits identified themselves as SCs and not harijan.

⁴⁶ At the first instance, the difference can easily be seen externally. At the top, the *badkas* live in big, planned, concrete houses with proper fixtures and flooring, amenities like electricity, in house toilets, cooking gas, washing machines, they own cars, tractors, tube-wells and wear good quality clothes etc. Even their livestock shelters are proper concrete constructions akin to small houses. At the bottom, *chutkas* live in bamboo and mud huts with thatched roofs and/or covered with plastic or tin sheets. In cases, there has been some IAY financed brick construction. Their granaries are mostly constructed of

phenomena do not recognise the analytical distinction. There is no specific term for OBCs. They are seen as being positioned below the *badkas* and above the *chutkas*. Later, in the caste-wise discussion of occupational patterns, it will be shown that there is a strong correspondence between *badkas-chutkas* and Bernstein's categories of petty capitalist and classes of labour respectively.

Henceforth, I have mainly used the local terminology or (upper, middle or lower) caste-class term. However, in explaining the social composition of the villages, I refer to the official categories, to bring out the difference between government classification and caste as social reality.

In tables 5.1 and 5.2 the social composition of Sapatganj and Basspur is shown respectively. Since Hindus are predominant in both villages and the few non-Hindu households are all Muslim, a separate table for each religion was not deemed necessary.

Table 5.1. Sapatganj: Caste Details of All Households (Figures indicate the number of households)⁴⁷

<i>Jati</i>	General	OBC	SC
Rajput	1		
Gupta	11		
Teli		3	
Ahir (Yadavs)		33	
Ansari (Muslim)		14	
Koeiri (Khushwaha)		2	
Kamkar (Kharwar)			7
Dhobi			10
Dusadh (Paswan)			15

mud and covered with straw. Other than their land and livestock, they own few agricultural implements like hoes and sickle. Cycles are common but not motorcycles. Some households have television, radio, a light bulb and other such small utilities.

⁴⁷ There are hundred households in this village, but four refuse to participate. Details of ninety-six households are mentioned.

Total number of households-96	12	52	32
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In Sapatganj, OBCs, comprising Telis, Ahirs, Ansaris and Koeiris are numerically preponderant. Next are the dalits—the Kamkars, Dusadhs and Dhobis. Locally, Kamkars are not regarded as unclean as the Dusadhs and Dhobis. This is derived from the fact that Kamkars are employed as domestic workers, for instance, as a cook in the village primary school and washing dishes in the Rajput house. The upper castes i.e. the Rajput and Guptas are a numerical minority.

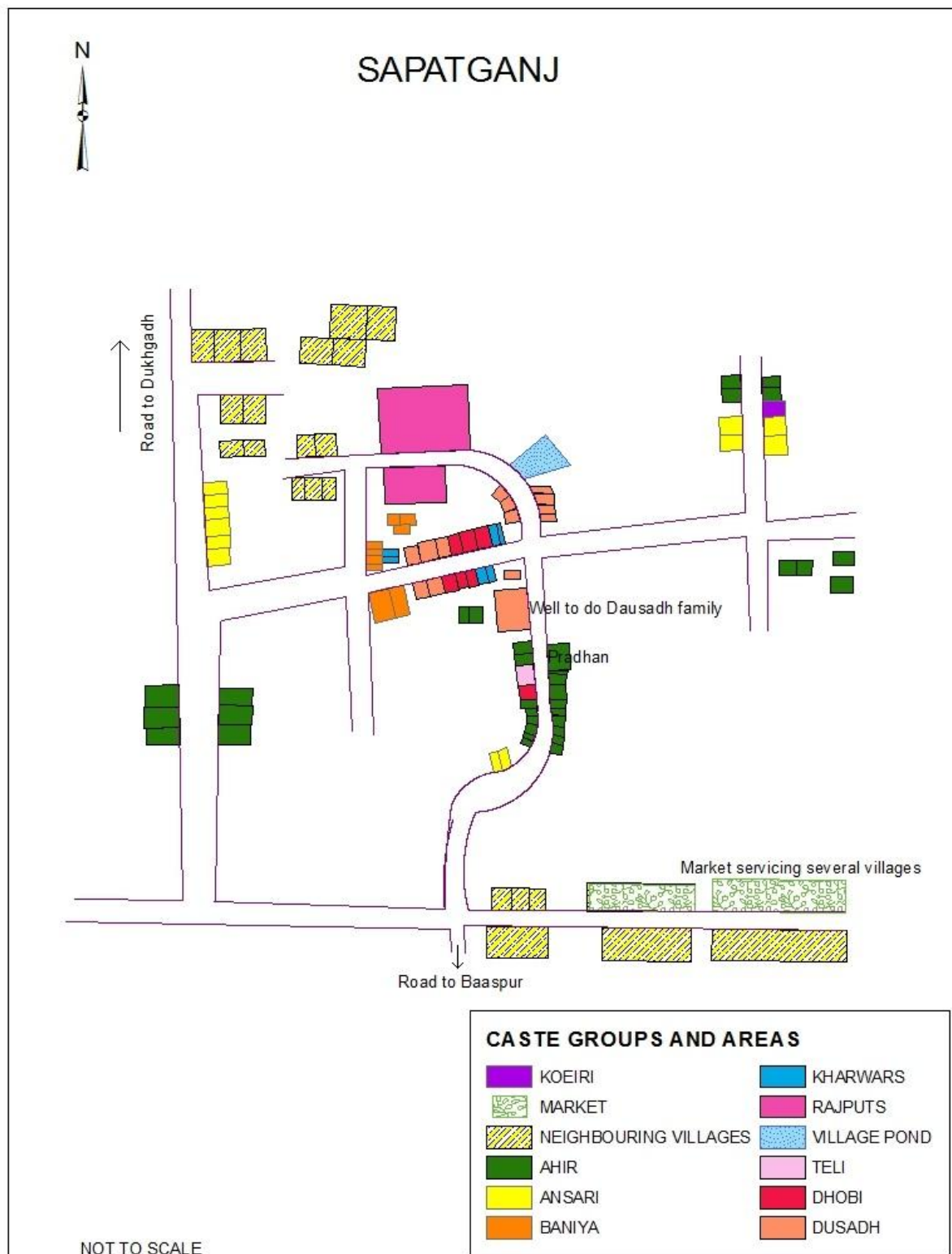
Table 5.2. Baaspur: Caste Details of All Households (Figures indicate the number of households)

<i>Jati</i>	General	OBC	SC
Pandit	1		
Brahmin	6		
Rajput	8		
Thakur	3		
Kayasth	8		
Mian ⁴⁸ (Muslim)	4		
Ansari (Muslim)		4	
Koeiri (Khushwaha)		23	
Hajjam		3	
Kamkar (Kharwar)			23
Dhobi			5
Dusadh (Paswan)			9
Chamar			41
Total number of households-138	30	30	78

⁴⁸ Generally, the term Mian is used to denote Muslim, but here the households identified their *jati* as Mian. I sought clarification, gave examples of other Muslim castes, but they still described themselves as Mian.

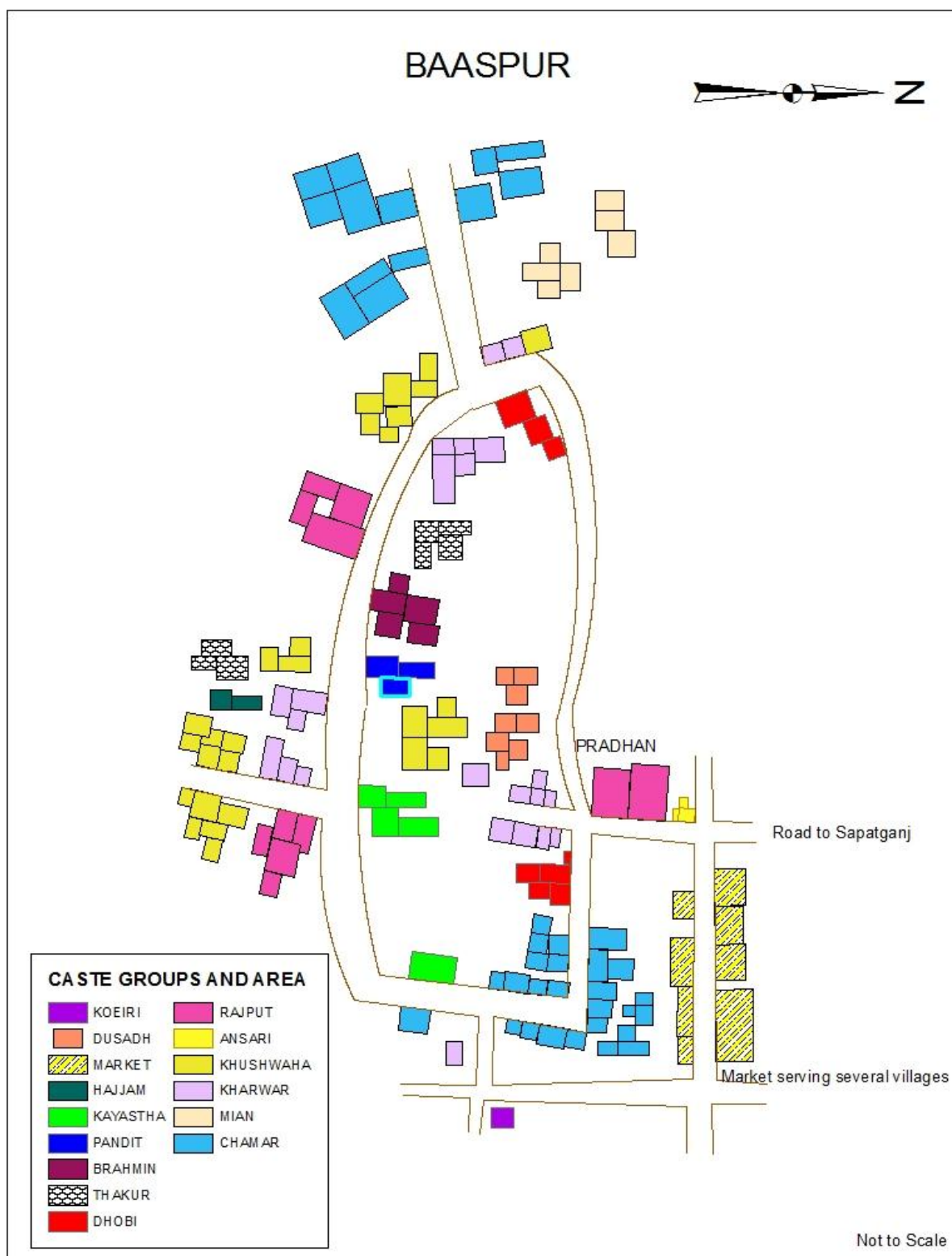
In Baaspur, more than half the households are dalit. Kharwars, Dhobi, Dusadh and Chamars are dalits. Inside the village, nothing was observed on which basis it can be deciphered whether one caste was less unclean than another. However, more and better examples of petty self-employment are seen in the case of Kharwars, including food preparation (this will become clearer when occupational patterns are discussed). Only one other such example was seen among non-Kharwar dalit households. So, in all probability it would not be wrong to judge Kharwars as less unclean. There are an equal number of OBC and upper caste households. The former includes Ansari, Koeiri and Hajjams. The upper castes included Pandit, Brahmin, Rajput, Thakur, Kayasth and Mian households.

Moving on to spatial organisation, both the villages are organised along the lines of caste and religion. As specified earlier, both are census villages (see p. 119). Pradhans (head of the panchayat) of the respective panchayats are residents of the studied villages.



Sapatganj has been shown in the map on the previous page. It does not have physically contiguous boundaries. Actually existing social and economic relations do not follow administrative village boundaries. It is composed of three settlements (hamlets): Main hamlet (*toli*) of the village is located in the centre. It is multi-caste in nature and includes *badkas*, the middle caste-class and *chutkas*, all three clustered separately along different streets; Second hamlet is largely composed of the middle caste-class Ansari households. It is the smallest hamlet, located at one tip of the village; Third hamlet, middle caste-class Ahirs are preponderant. This hamlet is distant from other settlements of the village, separated by fields and few houses/livestock sheds (*ghota*) of another village. The Ansari and Ahir *tolis* are not as integrated into the socio-economic relations of the village as the main *toli*. The Ansaris share closer ties with neighbouring village which is closer inhabited by more and better-off Muslim households..While for Ahirs, the reason is their relative physical isolation from the main village and are more integrated into the socio-economic life of the village just next to their hamlet.

In some cases, there is also a class aspect to this caste and religion based spatial organisation. This is indicative of class differences within caste categories. The class differences manifest itself in the household structure, ownership of land and other productive assets and socio-economic behaviour vis-à-vis other caste groups and within castes along gender and age lines. The nuances will be made clear in the section on caste-wise description of the occupational patterns. How these differences are implicated in the spatial organisation is very briefly indicated here. The Rajput and Guptas are the *badkas*. The former is positioned higher than the Guptas. Households. Both these castes are settled in the main hamlet of the village, but not in immediate vicinity. Gupta households are closer to other caste-class households, including Telis. In the Ahir *patti* (street), the economically better-off are clustered together at one end. The Ansaris do not show much internal differentiation in terms of class, like other *chutkas*. There is only one example of an economically better-off dalit-Dusadh-household, located at one end of the Dusadh households.



Baaspur's map has been given in previous page. s also spatially organised along caste and religious lines. Unlike Sapatganj, it has physically contiguous boundaries, but like Sapatganj, actually existing socio-economic relations do not follow administrative village boundaries.

Baaspur has four settlements. Approaching the village from the main road, the first hamlet one comes across is called the *babu* (upper caste-class men) *tola*.⁴⁹ It is the smallest hamlet, includes different castes, but so called because the *pradhan* lives in the village, as does another Rajput family. The two are the major employers of agricultural wage labour in the village. Chamar households are concentrated in the second hamlet. The third hamlet is the largest. It has households from different castes. Chamar households are again concentrated in the last hamlet. Geographically, Baaspur is much more compact than Sapatganj. Nonetheless, it shares socio-economic ties with other nearby villages and particularly a neighbouring one as the two together constitute one panchayat. As families expanded or joined families got divided, some residents of Baaspur (the older generation mostly) shifted to the outskirts, near the village with which it shares a panchayat. Contractors from the same village recruit villagers from Baaspur for migrant work. Residents of the fourth hamlet share deeper socio-economic ties with another village closer to their settlement.

At the level of hamlets, there is a further caste, class and religious aspect to this spatial structure. In the first hamlet, middle caste-class Ansaris live along one side of the village approach road. The *badkas* i.e. Rajput houses are situated at the centre of the hamlet, separated from other households in the hamlet by a wide expanse of land and flanked by fields at the front and back. Situated at the end of the hamlet are the *chutkas*, the Dhobi and Kharwars. In the second hamlet, the better-off Chamars live in *pucca* (concrete) houses, slightly set apart from the neighbouring huts. One Koeiri household is located outside the village perimeter, within their field and a single Kharwar household is located separately from the cluster of Chamar households. However, there is not much difference in the class position of most Chamar households, the Kharwar and Koeiri household, even though they are settled

⁴⁹ The word *babu* has a dual meaning. At a general level, it is a term used to refer to sons or young men. The sense in which it is used here refers to the upper caste/class men (or households). In both connotations, the word is used with an attitude of respect and deference towards the addressee.

separately. Majority of the households in this hamlet are *chutkas*. In the third hamlet as well, the *badkas* i.e. the Brahmins, Rajputs and Kayasths are clustered together, as are the middle caste-class Khushwahs and Hajjams and the *chutkas* i.e. Kharwar, Dusadhs and Dhobis. The class aspect is not evident in the last hamlet, but all Muslim houses are clustered together.

5.1.2. Land Relations

Land base is an important indicator of one's economic status. One Chamar male labourer attributed Chamars' poverty to expanding family size and small landholdings (Fieldnotes, 12 April 2010). A male dhobi labourer associated landownership with a sense of pride, self-worth and social status. As he put it, '*what is a man without land?*'⁵⁰ (Fieldnotes, 11 April 2010). The present social base of landownership (as it exists on the ground and not as per legal titling, see pp. 128-129) and landlessness is detailed in Tables 5.3 and 5.4 for Sapatganj and Baaspur respectively.⁵¹ Here, I will use official caste categories in the tables so as to leave the class aspect out of the equation for the time being. I will then describe the tables, highlighting any emerging correspondence between caste status and land position (as a marker of economic status). After this, I will bring in the local categories to bring out the underlying logic of *badka-chutka* terminology. However, it should be noted that land by itself is not a sufficient condition for labelling upper castes as *badkas*. It was indicated earlier that a broad economic power and political influence also matters. These nuances will become clearer in the caste-wise description of occupational patterns.

Table 5.3. Sapatganj: Caste-wise Distribution of Landholdings of All Households (all figures are in ha)

Caste (Total no. of	Landless (Less	Marginal (0.01-	Small (1.01-	Semi- Medium	Medium (4.00-	Large (More
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⁵⁰ To quote the male Dhobi labourer, '*be khet ka aadmi kauno aadmi hain?*'

⁵¹ Independnet kitchen was taken as the identification of one household unit. The landholding classification is from the NSS. The local unit used for land sizes is *katha* and the figures recorded have been converted into hectares unit using the following calculation: 4 decimal=1 *katha*, 20 *katha*=1 *beegha* (*pakka*), 1/4th *beegha*=1 acre and 1 acre=0.4ha. In very few instances where the respondent was not sure of actual size, an estimate was taken.

Households)	than 0.01)	1.00)	2.00)	(2.00- 4.00)	10.00)	than 10.00)
Upper Castes						
Rajput (1)	0	0	0	0	1	0
Gupta (11)	2	3	6	0	0	0
OBCs						
Teli (3)	1	0	1	1	0	0
Ahir (33) ⁵²	1	22	7	3	0	0
Ansari (14) ⁵³	3	9	1	1	0	0
Koeiri (2)	0	2	0	0	0	0
SCs						
Kamkar (7) ⁵⁴	1	5	1	0	0	0
Dhobi (10)	2	7	0	0	1	0
Dusadh (15)	0	14	0	1	0	0
Total (96)	10	62	16	6	2	0

In line with the regional trends, landlessness is limited and is not caste specific. The majority of the holdings are marginal and small, followed by semi-medium and medium. There is a complete absence of large holdings. Among the upper-castes, half the holdings are small and a quarter are marginal. There is only one case of a medium holding. In the OBC category, more than half are marginal holdings. Just under one-tenth of the holdings are small. The remaining few are semi-medium. In the case of SCs, almost all the holdings are marginal. There is only one case each of semi-medium and medium holdings. The land status of the lower-castes is the worst. The trend of family nuclearisation is particularly strong among them and is an important reason for the increasing fragmentation and marginalisation of landholdings among them.

⁵² In this category, there are three households (all brothers) which jointly cultivate 0.4ha. All three households are assumed to have 0.13ha. (for an explanation, see p. 29. Here the details of land arrangements will be provided only if they are different from the general trend stated on p.29.

⁵³ In this category, there are four households (brothers) which jointly cultivate 0.48ha Holding of each is taken to be 0.12.

⁵⁴ In this caste category, three households jointly cultivate 0.8ha. Land holding of each is taken as 0.26ha.

In Sapatganj, the largest landowner is the Rajput family, the biggest source of agricultural employment and wields considerable economic influence. They are also a source of credit, help labourers access loans and ration cards, they rent out their tractor and tube-well, allow labourers to use the hand-pump outside their house etc. The family is also well connected with the local bureaucracy. Though it can access political power through its networks, the Rajput family actively seeks political position either directly or indirectly by supporting a proxy figure. Political power is aspired because it gives knowledge of and access to development funds, other financial resources, public schemes and power to make crucial decisions like on which land should a school come up or redistribution of Gram Sabha land. These are controlled and channelled to augment one's social, economic and political authority. Social status and economic and political influence are undoubtedly the sources of *badkas* prestige and dominance in the region.⁵⁵

On the other hand, OBCs employ labourers on a smaller extent. Their middle caste status means that they are not revered like the Rajput family. These households are not a major source of credit for the villagers and do not wield political influence. The one exception is the Pradhan's house. It is actually the wife of the male head of the household who is the pradhan, but she is merely a proxy. The pradhan is a comparatively larger employer of agricultural labourers and is known to favour Ahir labourers (who also live near his house) in accessing NREGA work, BPL ration cards and IAY money. Unlike, the Rajputs, here the male family members are directly involved in cultivation and the wife of the male head of the household supervises the labourers. The SCs neither have land base which can be a source of economic influence, nor do they have or can access political power. Their caste is also of the lowest status. Therefore, they are *chutka*. However, there are two exceptions of slightly well to do dalit households. This is indicative of class differentiation within caste. Their economic influence is restricted to extending small loans.

⁵⁵ The Rajput family has set up a non-governmental organisation in the village (however, for the entire duration of the fieldwork, it was not observed to be actually functioning on ground). Sometimes family members expressed a desire to build a school in the village in future and at times they held functions to mark special occasions (I was shown a paper clip attesting to this). Such initiatives serve to assert their socio-political largesse and dominance. s

Table 5.4. Baaspur: Caste-wise Distribution of Landholdings of All Households (all figures are in ha)

Caste (Total no. of Households)	Landless (Less than 0.01)	Marginal (0.01- 1.00)	Small (1.01- 2.00)	Semi- Medium (2.00- 4.00)	Medium (4.00- 10.00)	Large (More than 10.00)
Upper Castes						
Pandit (1)	0	1	0	0	0	0
Brahmin (6)	0	5	0	1	0	0
Rajput (8) ⁵⁶	0	0	4	1	3	0
Thakur (3)	0	2	1	0	0	0
Kayasth (8)	0	2	1 ⁵⁷	1 ⁵⁸	4 ⁵⁹	0
Mian (4)	0	2 ⁶⁰	1	1	0	0
OBCs						
Koeiri (23) ⁶¹	0	18	3	1	0	0
Hajjam (3) ⁶²	0	2	0	0	0	0

⁵⁶ Three households jointly cultivate 4.8ha and landholding of each is taken to be 1.6ha.

⁵⁷ This household is related to a medium landowning household. Land relations between the two are described in footnote 58.

⁵⁸ This household is made of two brothers and their families. Both are in public employment and migrate with families. In the village they operate as one household (i.e. one kitchen), but both have separately leased out their share of land i.e. 2.4ha each. They take their share of the produce when they visit the village. Both have been classified as semi-medium landowners.

⁵⁹ In this caste category, there is one household (relative of the household mentioned in footnote 57) where the senior most male member has 2.4ha in his name. He lives in the household of his elder son (i.e. this household) who owns another 8ha in his name. In the former's landholding, his younger son and his family who constitute a separate household (i.e. household mentioned in footnote 12) also cultivate. Apart from this, both are independent entities as far as other relations are concerned. The landholding of the father and his younger son is taken to be 1.2ha each (2.4ha/2). The landholding of the elder son's household is 8ha (his own) + 1.2ha (father's) i.e. 9.2ha and the landholding of the younger son's household is taken to be 1.2ha. The former is classified as a medium landholding and the latter as a small landholding.

⁶⁰ According to the respondent from one of these two households, at the death of her parents, the entire landholding of 1.6ha was taken over by their father's younger brother (the second household in this category) who has given them 0.8ha from this to cultivate to support themselves. Landholding of both households is then taken to be 0.8ha.

⁶¹ Land position of one household is unknown. Land position of two households is disputed. These are brothers and it is clear that both households operate as distinct entities in social and economic aspects. The elder brother claimed 0.48ha in own name. The wife of the second brother (the respondent) did not her household's landholding size. It was claimed by her son that between his father and father's brother there was 1.36ha over which both the brothers are fighting. Given this fuzziness over the landholding size and for reasons of legitimate representation, what was claimed by them has been taken to be the basis of calculations in the above table. In another case, 0.4ha is jointly cultivated by three households and landholding of each is taken to be 0.13ha.

Ansari (4) ⁶³	0	4	0	0	0	0
SCs						
Kharwar (23) ⁶⁴	1	14	8	0	0	0
Dhobi (5)	1	4	0	0	0	0
Dusadh (9)	0	8	1	0	0	0
Chamar (41) ⁶⁵	1	35	3	2	0	0
Total (138)	3	98	22	7	7	0

Like Sapatganj, Baaspur also has a low incidence of landlessness, a prevalence of marginal holdings and the complete absence of large landholdings. Upper-castes are the largest landowners in the village. All medium holdings and over half the semi-medium holdings are found in this group, concentrated among the Rajputs and Kayasths. Most of the OBC and SC households are marginal holders, with isolated cases of semi-medium holdings. Nuclear families are common in case of SCs and an important factor for subdivision of holdings.

As in Sapatganj, in Baaspur also there is absence of complete overlap of social and economic status. But it is clear that the Rajputs are the dominant caste-class: the biggest landowners, employers of agricultural labour and a source of credit. In Baaspur, the post of pradhan is occupied by a Rajput who is serving his second consecutive term. In recent history, another Rajput and a Chamar have been pradhans. But the dalit labourers openly criticise the latter for being controlled by the upper caste-class people. The Rajputs have a well developed network of connections vis-à-vis block officials, police and other local administrative structures. The Kayasths are also big landowners. Though upper caste-class, their social status is inferior to that of

⁶² Landholding of one is unknown.

⁶³ Of these, three households are those of brothers. The land is in the name of their mother who lives separately (she was not captured in the village survey, so in all probability she lives outside the village boundaries). The total amount of land owned is 1.6ha. Some of this borders the main supra-village market. About 0.24ha of this 1.6ha is rented out to several shopkeepers. The remaining 1.36ha is cultivated by the sons. Their landholding size is taken to be as 0.45ha each. The mother lives on the rent or eats with either of her sons.

⁶⁴ Two households jointly cultivate 0.16ha and landholding position of each is taken as .08ha. In another case, two households jointly cultivate 0.48ha and 0.24 is taken as the landholding of each. In a similar another case, four households jointly cultivate 0.64ha and 0.16 is taken as landholding size of each.

⁶⁵ Two households jointly cultivate 0.56ha and the landholding of both is taken as 0.28ha each. In another case, 0.8ha is jointly cultivated by four households and landholding of each is taken to be 0.2ha.

Rajputs and they do not have the political authority associated with the Rajputs. Both, the Rajputs and Kayasths are referred to as *badkas*, but villagers are aware that Rajputs superior caste, economic influence and political authority make them more dominant and powerful. Similarly, villagers view the Brahmins and Pandit as *badka*, but mostly in terms of caste status only. This is indicative of economic differentiation within caste categories. As in Sapatganj, the OBCs and SCs of Baaspur, neither have the land base to be seen as important employers of agricultural labour, nor do they have any political clout. In terms of caste status, the SCs are the worst off. Therefore, they are *chutka*. But again, here too there are few cases of better-off households within castes.

For reasons mentioned previously (see p.127), land relations could not be historically traced. Nonetheless, a common observation made by many households, from different caste backgrounds, was the loss of land under land consolidation (see p.74). According to several labouring households, their ancestors were allocated smaller or poor quality plots. In few cases, parts of fields were acquired by the government for road construction, but the affected households were not compensated. With increasing population pressure, the older generation of many households has moved to livestock shelters on the village fringes; while some live on *aabadi* land i.e. Gram Sabha land allotted to dalit households. Inability to keep up with repayments of loans taken against land is a common cause for land loss.

Leasing is not a common phenomenon in either village. One Chamar female labourer, from Baaspur, attributed the low incidence of leasing to increased farming costs, subdivision of holdings across caste-class which means not many have substantial holdings to lease out some part and finally, now most people own some land and are not completely dependent on leased land. Leases were informal. There was no definite time-period of leases which could be revoked anytime provided there was no standing crop on the leased land. The lease system operates on 50:50 share basis with respect to the produce. The investments and decisions were independently made by the lessee. However, with few exceptions, sugarcane was not cultivated on leased land. Food crops are cultivated on leased land primarily. According to villagers, landowners do not like it if they grow sugarcane because it is will 'profit' villagers. One male Dhobi

labourer, from Baaspur, mocked that it will catch *badkas* evil eye.⁶⁶ It is inferred that since landowners cultivate sugarcane on their own land, they would benefit more from a share in food crops which can be used in their households.

From the existing lease arrangements, it is clear that land is basically leased in to supplement own agricultural production for household consumption. As such, land is seen as a crucial buffer against food insecurity. Land may be leased out for several reasons. One is that entire families migrate or unavailability of family labour due to reasons such as old age or disability. One example is that of Hajjam household in Baaspur: the male household head is an alcoholic and abusive man. His mother is blind and often has to resort to begging to support the family. His wife cannot afford farming costs. What little income she scrapes together is used for essential household expenses. She is responsible for their young children and this limits her participation in wage labour. For her it makes most sense to lease out her land, for this would at least entitle her to some produce without incurring any expense.

Lease arrangements may exist as a part of patron-client relations. For example, the Rajput household in Sapatganj had leased out a small plot of land to a labouring household that lived near it. The male member of the labouring household guarded the crop on another nearby located field of the Rajputs. He was seen as a loyal supporter and worker. Land could be leased out to avoid the costs of improving land quality and making it suitable for cultivation again. According to a landless Chamar male labourer from Baaspur, whose lease was revoked after only two years, people lease out land to labouring households who work hard on it to restore/improve the quality of land by investing in fertilizers, irrigation, ploughing and tilling, to prepare it for cultivation. But labourers get to harvest only one crop before it is taken back by the owner.

5.1.3. Occupational Structure

In the literature review undertaken in the second and third chapters, we saw that neoliberal globalisation has influenced rural classes in different ways and to varying

⁶⁶ As he put it, '*aankh lagi*'.

extents. In literature on agrarian political-economy, the changing role of agriculture in household reproduction and occupational diversification emerged as common features of rural classes. In case of small and marginal farmers, it was observed that cultivation is combined with a range of wage labour, self-employment activities and forms of labour⁶⁷ that are not monetarily remunerated but important for household reproduction. As little is known about village level occupational structure in the context of east UP, particularly in terms of caste and gender disaggregated data, a detailed description of the same is made. This is related to the class position of the social groups in terms of Bernstein's three-fold classification of petty capitalists, petty producers and 'classes of labour'. At the end of the discussion, some general remarks will be made.

The mapping exercise starts by: (i) reminding the reader how Bernstein's class categories are operationalised (ii) and with a table highlighting local occupations, in relation to gender and wage rates.

Bernstein (2010) defined petty capitalists as farmers' who reproduce themselves as capital, diversify economic activities and accumulate over a long time frame. They are the emerging rich capitalist farmers. Petty producers can reproduce themselves but not accumulate in the process. They combine family and wage labour. Petty producers can hire in labour or hire out their labour as and when needed. They may lease in or lease out land. These are middle farmers. Classes of labour find it difficult to reproduce themselves as labour. Their daily survival is dependent on the ability to sell their labour power. These are poor farmers who engage in different types of irregular and exploitative informal casual work and self-employment activities.

Lerche (2010) has used Bernstein's concept of classes of labour in the context of the Indian informal economy to identify who are the labourers. He proposes a hierarchy of types of wage labour and self-employment activities. In wage labour, formal occupations are at the top and casual agricultural labourers and bonded labour at the bottom. He mentions some other types of employment as well. Self-employment

⁶⁷ The term labour is used to refer to those non-income generating activities which nonetheless generate value and contribute to survival and subsistence. For example, collecting sugarcane roots used to be fire-wood, cutting grass or sugarcane leaves to be used as fodder or making cowdung cakes which are also used as fire-wood and fertilizer. They can be seen as livelihood or in kind remunerated activities.

activities that show a substantive asset base and/or employ workers are at the top and those indicative of survival mode or draw on unpaid family labour are at the bottom. Those situated towards the bottom of the occupational hierarchy are the classes of labour. According to Lerche, these occupations correspond with low income and power base. Dalits and scheduled tribes are concentrated in these. Though Lerche does not comment on the gender aspect, he cites and draws on Chen (2008) who argued that women are generally preponderant at the bottom of the informal economy (including agriculture) in low waged work.

The following table, drawing on data from Sapatganj and Baaspur, would highlight that women are concentrated in least paid jobs. This and other types of employment and labour activities and aspects such as concentration of dalits in low status and low paid jobs, as argued by Lerche in the Indian context, will come up subsequently in the caste-wise description of occupational patterns.

Table 5.5. Gendered Patterns of Labour Commodification and Wage Structure⁶⁸

Village	Occupation/Task	Wage (in Rupees)	Gender
Sapatganj	Sowing (i) Rice (ii) Sugarcane	(i) 25 per <i>bhoja</i> (bundle) ⁶⁹ (ii) 5-15 depending upon age or even just sweets	(i) Female (ii) Children
Baaspur		(i) Similar (ii) Similar	(i) Similar (ii) Similar
Sapatganj	Weeding	15 per day (for about eight hours of work and half of this for work done till afternoon.)	Female
Baaspur		20 per day (for about eight hours of work and half of this for work done till afternoon.)	Female

⁶⁸ Some occupations were found in one village only. Where occupation details are same for both villages, these are mentioned in detail in one village only and in the other it is stated that details are similar.

⁶⁹ One bundle is made of forty stalks. One bundle of seedlings is transplanted/sown over an area of one *katha*. It is claimed by labourers that one person is able to sow one *katha* only in one day. However, few other labourers and employers claim otherwise. Seedlings are separately grown in a 'nursery' (on small area of field) and these are then transplanted in the field. First, labourers uproot these seedlings and make bundles of forty stalks each. Before these can be transplanted, the field has to be watered. In the time that it takes the field to be watered, labourers go to another field and uproot seedlings and bundle them. They then go back and transplant seedlings in the first field, while the second field is being watered. In this manner, labourers may sow two to four *bhojas* per day.

Sapatganj	Harvesting (i) Rice/Wheat (ii) Cutting sugarcane leaves (iii) Cutting sugarcane stalks	(i) 20 per day or payment in kind i.e. one bundle of rice/wheat for every ten bundles harvested, threshed and delivered at the employer's house. (ii) 15 per day (iii) 50 per day	(i) Female (ii) Female (iii) Male
Baaspur		(i) One bundle of rice/wheat for every ten bundles harvested, threshed and delivered at the employer's house. (ii) Similar (iii) Similar	(i) Similar (ii) Similar (iii) Similar
Baaspur	Ploughing using oxen and a wooden plough	15 per <i>katha</i>	Male
Sapatganj	Various types of spade work (digging, mud filling, preparing the field)	50-80 per day	Male
Baaspur		Similar	Similar
Sapatganj	Loading/unloading	60-70 per day	Male
Sapatganj	Repairing or laying a new thatched roofs	100 per day	Male
Sapatganj	Unkilled construction work (carrying headloads, making concrete mixture, watering)	100 per day	Male
Baaspur		Similar	Similar
Sapatganj	Moulding bricks in kilns	200 per 1000 bricks (takes two to three days to mould thousand bricks)	Male
Sapatganj	Domestic worker (dish washer)	She washed dishes twice a day and sometimes mopped the floor in the mornings. She was given dinner everyday and a lump sum of 300 every month	Female
Baaspur		200-300 per month and a meal everyday	Female
Sapatganj	Sale of curd/milk	20-25 per kilo	Male and Female
Baaspur	Carpenter	75 per day	Male
Baaspur	Painter	125 per day	Male
Baaspur	Skilled construction work (brick laying)	200 per day	Male
Baaspur	General Store Owner	7000 per month	Male
Baaspur	Chemist Shop Owner	4000-5000 per month	Male
Baaspur	Rickshaw Driver	50 per day	Male
Baaspur	Tractor Driver	1500 per month. He is also given accommodation, food and old clothes	Male
Sapatganj	Tending to Livestock	500 per month. She is also given two meals per day.	Female

Baaspur		1300 per month. He is also given accommodation, food and old clothes ⁷⁰	Male
Baaspur	Anganwadi worker ⁷¹	1700 per month	Female
Baaspur	Wood-cutter	100 per day	Male
Baaspur	Primary school teacher (public employment)	3500 per month	Female
Baaspur	Doctor (public employment)	22,000-30,000 per month	Male

Several things stand out from the above table: the village labour market is gendered and within agriculture, there is a sexual division of labour; occupational diversification has occurred to a greater extent among men; male occupations are better paid and female occupations least well paid; public employment is well paid, even in non-regularised services like *anganwadi* workers. The wage structure was more or less fixed with respect to different types of work, but nevertheless it could change depending upon individual labour relations or work location. For example, labourers in unfree relations with dominant employers were likely to be paid less than the going wage rate and wage labour outside the village is remunerated at a higher rate. Regarding self-employment, it is difficult to establish a general pattern given the few instances of it. However, as pointed out by Lerche, a hierarchy is evident along the lines of caste, income and status. Some of these points will come up below in the caste-wise description of occupational patterns and some subsequently in the chapter. Non-labouring caste households are described very briefly. This mapping exercise describes castes from top to bottom. Only the main caste groups have been discussed in detail here.

Brahmin: All six Brahmin households are from Baaspur. One is a petty capitalist and others are petty producers. The petty capitalist Brahmin household combines own cultivation with local non-agricultural self-employment and migrant work. They are a semi-medium landowning household. Commercial farming is practised on a relatively

⁷⁰ However, in the household survey, the respondent from this household said that the person was paid only two or three hundred rupees per month. The wage mentioned above was quoted by the employer (pradhan).

⁷¹ Started in the 1970s, as a part of the GOI's Integrated Child Development Services Programme, *Anganwadi* centres and workers provide health and nutrition guidance to new mothers, administer polio vaccine, arrange pre-school activities etc. They are not permanent government workers. The respondent claimed that their salaries are paid by the World Bank.

large scale and is almost completely dependent on hired labour.⁷² Male members, and sometimes the wife of the male household head, are mostly involved in a supervisory capacity. The male household head owns a homeopathic pharmaceutical store in a public hospital in Lucknow. The eldest son owns a medicine shop in a local market. The middle son is in the military. In this household, local self-employment is symbolic of a non-agrarian base, resource endowment and a comparatively regular and better income source. Migrant work shows higher education level, economic progress and employment and income security, particularly where linked to public employment. Within the household, gendered relations and women's position in relation to life-cycle changes circumscribe the mobility, visibility and behaviour of female members of the family. With the exception of the eldest female member, all other women of the household practise seclusion. Women are involved in domestic work⁷³. Being a surplus generating, accumulating household that is involved in diverse economic activities which are secure, better paid and show a significant asset base, this Brahmin household is a petty capitalist household.

The petty producer Brahmin households are mostly self-employed. They are marginal landowners. Agriculture is largely a subsistence activity, drawing on male and female family labour, and is combined with small scale sugarcane cultivation. The degree of mechanisation is low.⁷⁴ Livestock rearing is a commercial activity drawing on male and female family labour.⁷⁵ Non-agricultural self-employment is seen in three households. Men from these households work as carpenters (home based). They usually get orders to make or repair agricultural implements and this demand is concentrated around season time. Furniture orders are few and inputs may be supplied by the customer. One carpenter also operated a clock/watch repair shop in a

⁷² By commercial farming is implied sugarcane cultivation primarily. In the case of big landowners, surplus rice or wheat may also be sold.

⁷³ Including caring for the elderly and children.

⁷⁴ Mechanisation refers to use of combine harvester (seen only in the case of big landowners) and tractors which are usually rented in by the petty producers and classes of labour to varying extents and depending upon social factors (see chapter 4, p.121).

⁷⁵ Livestock involves cows, buffaloes, goats and in the case of Muslims chickens as well. By livestock rearing as a commercial activity is meant that these animals are either sold and/or surplus milk/curd is sold. Few households own oxen and a plough. Male members of these households undertake wage labour as ploughmen. A gendered division of labour is implicit in livestock rearing. Women take goats for grazing. Women or children cut grass for fodder every evening. Women make cowdung cakes. Women, children or men (if at home) tend to livestock at home. Decisions regarding sale of milk or livestock can be made jointly, or just by women if men are migrant workers. But how this money is spent, is mainly a male decision.

neighbouring block on rented ground. According to his wife, there was no income from this shop. Such instances of self-employment irregular and low-paying, but nonetheless, a sign of skill based occupational diversification and a minimum level of productive asset base. The few instances of labour commodification, were as local agricultural (male and female) and casual wage labour (male). In neighbourhood exchanges, in cutting grass for fodder or as wage labourers, these women are more mobile, visible and show a degree of autonomy.

Rajput: The one Rajput household in Sapatganj and eight in Baaspur, are all petty capitalists. All are surplus producing farming households undertaking extensive sugarcane cultivation. In both villages, Rajputs are the dominant landowners and main employers of agricultural labour. They rent in combine harvesters and hire out own tractors⁷⁶. Men may plough fields with tractors, but otherwise they and the eldest women of the households are involved in agriculture in supervisory capacity only (with one exception, where men and women did manual labour, but irregularly). Livestock rearing is not a commercial activity (appendix 3[i]). Migrant work is linked to public employment and non-agricultural self-employment (appendix 3[ii]). With the exception of a woman primary school teacher, all other instances of public employment are found in the case of men— an engineer, doctor and a policeman. Another person is a compounder in a government hospital in Meerut, though it is not clear if he is a regular employee or not. Two, a dentist and lawyer, are based in Lucknow.⁷⁷ These types of employment are associated with high educational qualifications, stability and security, strong resource base and higher status. The responsibilities, mobility and social conduct of Rajput women are similar to the women of the petty capitalist Brahmin household (appendix 3[iii]). The Rajputs dominant economic and social standing is bolstered by the fact that they are the key political players in the villages (see p.133).

However, this does not mean that there is no differentiation within the caste. Differentiation can be seen in the quantity and types of assets owned, the extent to which commercial agriculture is practiced, the political and economic influence

⁷⁶ The tractors were rented out to villagers for ploughing. Tractors with attached trolleys were rented out for ferrying people, transporting material etc.

⁷⁷ In these cases, migration may or may not be family based; temporary or permanent (appendix 3[ii]).

commanded. For instance, the serving Rajput Pradhan of Baaspur wields greater power and influence than other Rajputs in the village. He is the largest employer of agricultural labour in the village and more crucially many labouring households can access their land only via the Pradhan's fields which is a major cause of dependence and subservience.

Gupta: All eleven Gupta families live in Sapatganj and are marginal and small petty producer households. Sugarcane is cultivated on a small-scale. Mechanisation is low. Agriculture draws on family (male and female) and hired labour, though family labour is only an occasional feature in most cases and usually takes the form of labour control i.e. working alongside labour as a method of supervision. While the extent of hired labour is relatively small in comparison to the Rajput household, overall the Guptas are net hirers of labourers. Livestock rearing is a commercial activity. Two instances of non-agricultural self-employment are seen in case of men; a wedding music band and a small tent house operation. These petty businesses are home based and depending upon the scale of work, labourers may be hired. The only instance of female non-agricultural self-employment is a home based small *kirana* (general store), stocked with stationary, tobacco, food items etc. These forms of self-employment activities underline a better-off resource base, ownership of productive assets and possible employment of others. At the same time, these do not show substantial educational attainment or vocational skills. Though irregular, they are better paid than agricultural and local casual wage labour and are in keeping with the high social status attached to their own local caste perception.

Agricultural wage labour is the only form of local male and female labour commodification and this too was seen only in the case of two households; one was landless and the other had mortgaged land. According to one Gupta woman, agricultural wage labour was not her *jati's* occupation. According to one male migrant worker, agricultural work and casual labour is associated with humiliation and embarrassment, particularly in the case of returning migrant workers. There is also the added dimension that local wage labour would put upper caste Guptas in a subordinate position vis-à-vis other upper-caste employers. On the other hand, it would be shameful to be employed by those inferior in social status. This assertion, however, was challenged by the local 'classes of labour' who pointed out that Guptas

lie since it is embarrassing for an upper-caste to admit doing such wage labour. Later, few Gupta women admitted to taking up wage labour under extreme economic duress. A man in the military is the only example of public employment. Migration is an important source of income for most Gupta households. Only men migrate and nearly three quarters of the households reported one or more migrant members at the time of the survey. As migrants, they are involved in petty trades and casual labour. Examples include, an electrician, a labour contractor, vegetable vendors, weavers, construction labourers and selling clothes door to door. Migrants reflect relative stability and regularity in terms of destinations and the type of work undertaken. Migration is a much preferred alternative to the oppressive and exploitative local labour relations. It is a source of irregular but substantial income. Migration is associated with a sense of pride and achievement.

The social conduct of Gupta women is similarly prescribed by gender and life-cycle changes, but not as strictly as in the case of petty capitalist Brahmin and Rajput women, given their weaker economic position. For example, of the two female labourers, one was elderly and her mobility and interaction were not restricted or subjected to societal monitoring as is for a Rajput woman. The other female labourer was young but her participation in wage labour was 'justified' on the grounds that her husband was a migrant and there was no other family member to ensure daily household reproduction. The woman operating the general store was also elderly. As such, these women show relative freedom of movement and autonomy.

Kayasth: All eight Kayasth households are from Baaspur. They are all petty producers, though lines between Kayasth marginal and small landowners and classes of labour are blurred. In other words, Kayasth petty producers are not a homogenous group. Commercial and subsistence agriculture is combined to various extents in the case of Kayasths, depending upon the landholding size. Mechanisation is low; in very few cases harvesting may be mechanised but ploughing operations are largely undertaken by hiring tractors. Agriculture is based on family and hired labour. In family labour, it is largely men who are involved and they are involved in supervisory capacity or even undertake manual labour. Female members of only two or three households occasionally do agricultural work in own field and these are either older

women or daughters. The component of hired labour is small in comparison to petty capitalists. Livestock rearing is undertaken as a commercial activity.

Much like the Guptas, Kayasths do not participate in local wage labour. Their upper-caste status is a 'limitation'. An elderly Kayasth woman asserted that even eight standard pass Kayasths do not do wage labour for others but live on their income from own cultivation. Another middle-aged Kayasth woman remarked that an upper-caste man will not work in others houses.⁷⁸ One Kayasth woman mocked that 'Srivastavas do not have the stamina to do farming themselves. They fall sick if they go to the field for two minutes. Kayasths will employ labour even if they have only two katha land. They may go to the field to supervise.' The one example of non-agricultural self-employment is of a man owning a medical store in a local market on rented ground. One man is a primary school teacher in a nearby village. This is the only example of local labour commodification. One or more male members of three households are migrant workers and in one of these instances, the entire family migrates. In all cases, migration is stable. Two male members of one household are in public employment (Indian Railways) and their families are based with them. Women do not practise seclusion but are still restricted to the domestic economy.

Ahir: All thirty-three Ahir⁷⁹ households are from Sapatganj. They are all petty producers. Agriculture is mainly subsistence oriented and dependent upon family labour (male and female). Very few households reported hiring in labour. Tractor ploughing is common. Men and women are involved in livestock rearing. In line with their traditional occupation, selling of milk and curd is common. Curd is made and sold by women in the village or to nearby shops (in this case, either shop-keepers come or male members of the households go to them, not women).⁸⁰ Men and women

⁷⁸ To quote her, '*ab aap jaante hain, bada aadmi kha jaayega kisi ke ghar mein kaam karne*'.

⁷⁹ The pradhan's (Ahir) household is not considered. This is because of lack of access (see p.125). But my sense, from participant observation and drawing on conversations with villagers, is that it would be classified as a petty capitalist household positioned below the Rajput household (at least socially and economically, for the political domain is consistently competitive and changing). This household hires combine harvestors. The male members of the household may do manual work in their fields. The wife of the male head of the household also comes to the field, located at some distance from the house, to supervise labour. Ahir households in the main part of the village are located in the same lane as the pradhan's households and access to them was also very limited, particularly in the context of collecting oral histories.

⁸⁰ Practice of caste based occupation was seen in some other (albeit few) cases during the course of fieldwork in the region. For example, the Dom caste reared pigs and made baskets and hand fans;

from roughly half the households do agricultural wage labour. Non-agricultural labour is undertaken by male labour of few households only. This includes jobs such as casual labour in construction, sugar mills (loading/unloading trucks), brick kilns, as a shop assistant, watchman, peon in a private school and tractor driver.⁸¹ Migrant work, as a risk spreading and coping mechanism, is common among young men. They work as weavers, electrical workers, casual labourers, tailors, agricultural labourers, drivers and factory workers. Women's participation in the domestic economy and wider socio-economic conduct is influenced by the gendered household relations and how they are positioned vis-à-vis other women in terms of changing life cycle. Social interaction or movement is not rigidly constrained, at least in households where women undertake wage labour. Few households undertake livelihood activities. Women primarily do these and men may be involved in sugarcane harvesting on a *geda* basis.⁸²

Koeiri: Of the twenty-five Koeiri households, two are in Sapatganj and the rest are in Baaspur. All are petty producers. Sugarcane is cultivated on a small scale. At the most, tractors are used for ploughing. Agriculture is mainly based on family labour (men and women). Livestock rearing is a commercial activity. Non-agricultural self-employment is uncommon. All six instances of it are in Baaspur. Male members of three households own general stores; two of these are located in the market and one in the village. In the latter case, the young wife also helps out. One man owns two speakers which are rented out for various functions at hundred rupees per day. Male members of another house run a tobacco and a mobile phone repairing shop in a local market. In both cases, the start-up money was taken from a SHG located in a nearby block. One of them had taken ten thousand rupees from the SHG and has to deposit two-hundred and fifty rupees per week. He earns about one thousand rupees per week.

Bhedyads (shepherds) reared sheep, Chamar as cobbler; Koeiris grew and sold vegetables, some Muslim women travelled from village to village selling bangles, clothes, bindi, sindoor etc. Largely, these would be middle-aged women. Other caste women may also weave baskets or make curd, but only for household consumption. One Ahir woman pointed out that while Muslim women sold clothes and cosmetics door to door in villages, men from any caste could do this. It would follow from this that unlike women, it is easier for men to diversify but women are expected to stay within prescribed caste norms.

⁸¹ Where labour from any of the three field sites worked in brick-kilns, they were involved only in moulding bricks. The chimney work is solely the reserve of incoming migrant labour from Ranchi.

⁸² In sugarcane harvesting, men cut the stalk and women cut the leaf tops. Labour is not employed for sugarcane harvesting usually. Men travel in groups around villages to cut sugarcane. They take the leaf tops and use it as fodder and leave the sugarcane in the field. Women cut leaf tops in their own village.

These forms of self-employment are indicative of a non-agrarian base, ability to access resources like credit through SHG, possession of some resource base or productive assets and shops are located in relatively prime location with their attendant benefits like a broader customer base, market rates and timely payment.

Very few Koeiris undertake agricultural wage labour. Most of the female labourers are middle-aged or elderly and in case of young married women, it was noticed that they are from nuclear households with no senior family members to depend upon. According to one woman, Koeiris do not work in others' fields. Non-agricultural forms of labour commodification are found in the case of men only. Examples include, collie work, skilled construction work, as a painter, operating the village PDS outlet and one instance of teacher in a private nursery school. Although not extensive, migration is an important source of income for a little less than half the households. Mostly young men are migrant workers, but in few of these, migration is family based. Types of migrant work include skilled and unskilled construction work in Lucknow, as weavers in Surat, embroiderer in Delhi, as a welder in Meerut and as casual labourers. Three men were in public employment: one was in police, one was in some kind of agricultural job (spraying pesticide) and details of the third were not known as the entire family had migrated and villagers did not know the details.

Here also, women are responsible for all household chores and they are highly likely to be engaged in livelihood activities, while men harvest sugarcane on *geda* basis. Seclusion is not observed in the case of Khushwaha women in relation to their relatives or neighbours. With the exception of young married women, their mobility is not restricted as in the case of upper-caste petty capitalists.

Ansari: There are a total of eighteen Ansari households, four in Basspur and the remaining in Sapatganj. All are petty producers. Largely subsistence farmers, both men and women are involved in agriculture. Tractor ploughing is the only form of mechanisation. Livestock rearing is undertaken as a commercial activity. There are only two examples of non-agricultural self-employment work. One man owned a motorcycle repair shop and the other a cycle repair shop, both in a local market. According to the latter, income fluctuated widely; in one day he could make anything up to hundred rupees. One of the household's had a jeep which previously was

operated as a taxi. Another household had a (broken down) wheat grinding machine. A female member of the household operated it when it worked. The family planned to sell it and were waiting for scrap iron and steel prices to rise.

Men and women from very few households do agricultural wage labour which is the only form of local labour commodification.⁸³ The four Baaspur Ansari households are located next to the *pradhan*'s house. Women from three of these households did agricultural wage labour for the *pradhan* primarily, but stopped since the last few years. This is associated with upward economic mobility owing to stable migration and high remittances and domestic responsibilities. According to one Ansari woman, they are 'untouchables' and therefore cannot do paid domestic labour or other such work in the houses of *badkas*. One man in the police service was the only example of public employment.

Migration is an extensive and enduring trend. In Sapatganj, most households have migrating members and migration can be traced back to 1970s at least. Its early appearance among the Ansaris (as also their absence in local non-agricultural self-employment activities and patterns of labour commodification) has to be understood in view of their segregation from the village based socio-economic relations. Because of this they faced greater vulnerability and insecurity in relation to other groups and were forced to seek alternate sources of livelihood. Only young men migrate. They work as scrap dealers, as a weaver, welder, tailor, truck driver and various other forms of casual labour. In terms of destination and work type they reflect considerable stability.

In Baaspur, male members of three households are involved in migrant work. They are brothers. The eldest has been working in Saudi since the last six years. In addition to working in a cloth and tailoring shop, he also undertakes other casual work such as construction labour, tiling, painting etc. The middle brother has been migrating to Saudi since two years. He works as a truck driver and does casual labour such as electrical work. Remittances are high and comparatively regular (approximately ten to

⁸³ There are examples of members of few more households who did agricultural wage labour in the past or worked as a tailor or a vegetable vendor, but not since male members from these households took to migrant work.

sixteen thousand rupees every two to three months). The youngest brother went to Saudi only about two months earlier and does casual labour.

Surprisingly, socio-cultural restrictions are not seen in the case of Ansari women to any significant extent. Even though they do not participate in wage labour, they do not veil and move freely in their hamlet. This is seen even in the case of upwardly mobile Baaspur Ansari households. Ansari women too are anchored to the responsibilities of domestic chores and care and reproductive responsibilities. Women from Baaspur Ansari households do unpaid labour for the *pradhan* because they can access their fields only through the *pradhan*'s fields. They are also indebted to the *pradhan*. The incidence of unpaid labour has decreased over time however. They are able to meet debt payments through remittances. Their withdrawal from agricultural wage labour has also reduced their dependency on the *pradhan* who is the major employer of agricultural labour. At times, women from these households try to evade these 'tied' labour services through procrastination and making excuses. This should not however be taken to mean that there are no more grounds for dependency (for example, accessing fields for grazing). These women observed that they are constantly subjected to pressure by the *pradhan*'s household. Most households undertake livelihood activities, done mostly by women. Men may be involved in sugarcane harvesting on a *geda* basis.⁸⁴

Kharwar: All thirty Kharwar households are classified as classes of labour. Seven of these are in Sapatganj and the rest in Baaspur. Almost all Kharwars are marginal holders. Agriculture is largely undertaken as a subsistence activity and some households cultivate sugarcane on a small-scale. Agriculture is family based. Exchange labour is very less.⁸⁵ In rare one or two cases, due to unavailability of family labour, one or two labourers may be hired in peak season. Both, men and women are involved in own cultivation. Tractor ploughing may or may not be a

⁸⁴ In sugarcane harvesting, men cut the stalk and women cut the leaf tops. Labour is not employed for sugarcane harvesting usually. Men travel in groups around villages to cut sugarcane. They take the leaf tops and use it as fodder and leave the sugarcane in the field. Women cut leaf tops in their own village.

⁸⁵ To save on labour costs, the *chutkas* often work on each others fields on an exchange basis. These exchange relations follow caste and neighbourhood ties. Exchange labour can only take place between households owning land and having access to family labour. Labour is exchanged primarily in paddy transplantation, a female task. As such, male labour is involved in exchange labour relations to a much less extent.

mechanised operation. While livestock (cattle and goats) is sold, Kharwars may or may not sell milk, depending on need, consumption and availability of a surplus. Households not owning livestock sell the straw/chaff (after harvest) to livestock owners. By one estimate, this usually brings in one hundred and fifty to two hundred rupees or a maximum amount of three hundred rupees.

Only four examples of non-agricultural self-employment were found, all undertaken by men. In the case of a home based general store, women helped out. One owned a sweet shop in a local market and according to his wife, income from the shop varied between one to two thousand rupees per month. Their son ran a separate snack shop in the same market. His wife helped out at the shop when she brought him lunch. Another ran a general store in the same local market and his sons assisted in the shop. Shops in the market are located on rented space.

In comparison to petty producers, Kharwars are involved more in local wage labour. Agricultural wage labour is an important form of male and female labour commodification. However, in few cases of joined families where the elders are still involved in wage labour, the young daughters-in-law do not participate in agricultural wage labour. Examples of non-agricultural employment among men include: drivers, construction labourers, coolies, hotel workers (these were children who were paid three hundred rupees per month), carrying head loads of bricks at a kiln, tending to livestock and a watchman. A woman did domestic work for the Sapatganj Rajput family and was an occasional cook at the village school. During the course of fieldwork, several women pointed out that Kharwar women could do work that could bring them in touch with non-dalits because they are locally perceived as less unclean than other dalits. In Baaspur, a widow did casual labour under NREGA. She is landless and has five children to support. There are no other adult members in the household.⁸⁶ There was only one example of public employment, that of a man in Indian Railways.

⁸⁶ This woman also mentioned that she was unable to do the physically demanding work (carrying head loads) on a regular basis. She had only worked under NREGA once for few days. Two things can be inferred from the fact that she had never done non-agricultural wage labour outside of NREGA: first, only a government sponsored scheme can effectively challenge the gendered division of labour and second, this example indicates that this type of wage labour participation is a survival mechanism, not a preferred choice and therefore, it is questionable if the woman would undertake similar work had there been a male member in the house.

Most of the Kharwar households in Sapatganj had male migrant workers, but in Baaspur, migration was uncommon. Types of migrant work included tailoring, painting, casual labour, a tractor driver, scrap dealer, cloth weaving and as a carpenter. Livelihood activities are more common in Sapatganj. In both villages, these are undertaken by women and children mostly. Men are involved in harvesting sugarcane *geda*. In times of need, to cover any shortfall in food or such requirement, Kharwars show a high dependency on upper-caste-class. This is possibly because, among classes of labour, others are less likely to be able to provide any help.

What is common across castes and classes so far is that the role of women is strongly gendered and embedded in the domestic economy. However, significant differences exist in terms of socio-economic behaviour of women from petty capitalist and petty producer households and dalits, an overwhelming number of who belong to the category of classes of labour. While women belonging to the classes of labour are still subjected to socio-cultural controls and monitoring, in certain aspects they show greater autonomy and agency. For example, whether or not they participate in wage labour is still circumscribed by factors like age and availability of other household members being able to productively contribute to its reproduction. However, economic needs and absence through most of the year of migrant male members means that women start moving out of the house for wage labour at a relatively early age. These women show initiative, organisational skills and independence in accepting wage labour, organising labour groups and religious functions, negotiating their wages and work conditions. They travel to other villages for work, social, religious, health and such reasons, alone or in the company of other villagers. They travel only when there is a 'justifiable' cause and avoid interaction with unknown men.

For example, dalit women from the classes of labour organise big religious functions that last through the night and provide food. These are attended by women from all over the area. While their social behaviour and etiquette (with whom do they mingle, where they go, how they are dressed etc.) are closely monitored in the village, on special occasions, they can let themselves loose, dress up, dance etc. They show organizational skills and decision-making powers. The neighbourhood women

contribute to the organization, purchase of food materials, hiring of loud speakers, the main organizer approaches a *badka* to rent his tractor-trolley to purchase things from the market (women do not go to the market, so they send some male from the village or tell the tractor driver what has to be bought) and to ferry people. However, on the other hand, there are cases where in so doing women have faced the wrath and suspicions of their husbands (and in some instances physical abuse) and the taunts of even the upper-castes and classes for indulging in 'loose behaviour', for being out the whole night, for dressing up etc.

Nonetheless, women belonging to the dalit labouring households do not meekly accept or submit to male authority. Low caste women are very vocal and they express their anger, discontent, rebellion indirectly. For example, by not performing essential chores like cooking or feeding the livestock, refusing food, frequent domestic fights, verbal diatribes etc. They may win their conflicts in this way. However, there may also be adverse consequences such as wife-beating. At the same time, female classes of labour blame their rowdy behaviour on their *chutka* status and contrast it to *badkas*. As one female dusadh labourer put it, 'badkas do not fight amongst themselves and even if they do, no one comes to know, unlike in the case of chutkas who are loud, brash and the entire village comes to know of it. Badkas possess '*buddhi*' (implying knowledge and intelligence)'. A sense of low esteem and self-blame is evident among the *chutkas* vis-à-vis their position and status.

Dhobi: There are ten Dhobi households in Sapatganj and four in Baaspur. All belong to the classes of labour. Agriculture is again subsistence oriented, with minimal sugarcane cultivation, but their subsistence is commodified. Agriculture is mechanised to a limited extent, if at all. It is based on a combination of family (male and female, and the participation of young daughter-in-laws depends on economic needs and availability of other family labour) and exchange labour relations. In isolated one or two cases, households may hire in labour at peak agricultural season. This is not necessarily a sign of economic prosperity. For instance, in one case, the male member of the house was a migrant worker and in view of his young wife's restricted mobility, they had to hire labour. Livestock rearing is a commercial activity.

Non-agricultural self-employment activities are common and typically evidenced only in the case of men. These include giving tuitions, roofing, digging water boreholes and plying donkeys carrying brick loads in kilns in dry season, running a cycle-repair-cum-snack shop on rented ground in the local market which fetched anything between fifty to hundred rupees in a day or even nothing. The wife of another cycle repair shop owner mentioned earnings between fifty and four hundred rupees per day. A man owned a large battery operated music speaker which was rented out on special occasions for fifty rupees per hour. The male head of one household ran a rice mill from the cowshed adjacent to the house. Male and female members helped out with this. His son runs an omelette stall in a local market, located on space rented at eighty rupees per month. He buys a box of eggs for five hundred rupees and sells one omelette for four rupees. Egg trays are collected and sold to a scrap dealer for four rupees per kg. According to his wife there is no profit but, it is a source of little income crucial to their survival. His younger brother ran a cycle repair shop in the same market on ground rented for a similar rate. These types of self-employment activities are of survival mode.

Agricultural wage labour is common and undertaken by both, men and women (involvement of young daughter-in-laws depended on availability of other family labour). Non-agricultural forms of labour commodification are confined to male labour. Examples include unskilled construction labour, tractor driving (year round or only during sugarcane harvesting to transport sugarcane to the mill) and ironing clothes in someone's shop in the village market. Migrant work figures prominently in Sapatganj Dhobis occupational patterns. Only young men migrate. Types of migrant work include tailoring, embroidery, welding, plumbing and working in a packaging factory.

Livelihood activities are extensively undertaken and here men only harvest sugarcane on *geda* basis. Unpaid labour services like scooping, sweeping or tending livestock are provided by Dhobi women to *badkas*. These often overlap with debt relations, neo-bondage or are undertaken in view of a household's history with a particular *badka* (see oral history of Aitara, appendix, pg. 20). These may or may not be willingly undertaken. An indebted household (particularly one situated near the creditor household) is not in a position to decline to do this work, while a non-

indebted household may provide unpaid labour services as insurance against unforeseen needs or emergencies. In the latter sense, the recipient household is perceived as a source of food security, a medium of accessing resources, a source of credit and more generally as benevolent ‘protectors’ who would help out in times of need. Underlying such self-exploitation is an awareness of the social and economic divide between *badkas* and *chutkas* and the dependency of the latter on the former. Irrespective of the circumstances under which a household provides unpaid labour, refusal to do such work can be subtly expressed in the form of procrastination. In comparison to livelihood activities, ‘benefits’ of doing unpaid labour are not immediate or direct. But both are crucial to the survival of local classes of labour. The socio-economic behaviour of Dhobi women is similar to that of Kharwar women.

Dusadh:⁸⁷ The fifteen Dusadh households in Sapatganj and nine in Baaspur, all belong to the category of classes of labour. Almost all Dusadh households are marginal landowners. As is typical of classes of labour, agriculture is subsistence oriented and in some cases combined with minimal sugarcane cultivation. Cultivation draws on men and women (with rare exceptions of young married women) and also exchange labour. In isolated cases, households may hire in labourers for a day or two during peak agricultural seasons because of individual household circumstances. For example, one woman’s husband was a migrant worker. She had a very young child to take care of. Though relatively young, her mobility and wage labour participation was not restricted by socio-cultural reasons. Nonetheless, she had to hire few children to sow sugarcane in her field. She worked alongside them, while her elder daughter, who had skipped school that day, took care of her young sister. Only ploughing operations may be mechanised. Livestock rearing is a commercial activity.

⁸⁷ Access to one Dusadh household in Sapatganj was severely limited (p. 125). Only survey details could be collected for this household. From observations, survey data and conversations with villagers, this household would be categorised as a petty capitalist below the Rajput family and the *pradhan*’s household or as a comparatively well-off petty producer household. This was the only Dusadh household which had a male member in public employment (now retired). This is an important factor in explaining its relatively better resource endowment and land position (semi-medium). During the course of fieldwork, it was observed that the same household opened a tiny general cum *paan* (betel leaf, tobacco) store in front of their house which was operated by the male members. In the village it is only engaged in own agriculture and petty self-employment activity. This is combined with male migrant work where they undertake casual labour as well. The women of this household practice seclusion and this is reflective of a widely held view that across all groups and strata upward economic mobility is associated with withdrawal of women from social and economic activities.

Non-agricultural self-employment activities are not common. Only men engaged in these. Examples include: digging water boreholes, plying a pushcart in a neighbouring block on which load is transported, cycle/puncture repair workshop, *dholak* (musical instrument) player, wood cutter, a quack doctor or compounder and a teacher who gave private tuitions. Self-employment appears as a survival activity, an irregular source of income from mostly low status and lowly paid work. Agricultural wage labour is the most predominant form of male and female labour commodification. Men undertake non-agricultural wage labour as well. They worked as casual labourers engaged in digging, mud-filling, carrying head loads, loading/unloading; as unskilled construction labour; in brick kiln work and in a sugar factory. A woman from Baaspur is an *anganwadi* worker. Though this is not regularised government service, it is secure work, better and timely remunerated, indicative of education, does not involve the drudgery of agricultural wage labour and is not perceived as degrading work.

Overall, migration is an important source of income, but the decision to migrate is shaped by the availability of other family members to support the household in absence of migrants. Securing daily survival in the face of economic vulnerability requires all members to be productively employed and particularly men as male forms of local wage labour are more remunerative. This was certainly the case with Sapatganj Dusadhs where a little less than half the households, had migrant male members, while in Baaspur, more than half the households had migrant workers. Unlike in the case of Ansari petty producers, migration has not contributed substantially to the household income and has not decreased reliance on local wage labour for Dusadhs. Only young men migrate. They worked as a welder, rickshaw puller, cloth weaver, as hawkers, painters, scrap dealers and did other low-paying and low-status informal casual labour. In terms of destination, duration and type of work, Dusadh migrant workers are more unstable than Ansari migrants. Remittances from Dusadh migrants are lower than Ansaris. In some cases, Dusadhs were involved in debt based migration and reported receiving delayed and low payment at the destination.

Regarding livelihood activities, social conduct of women and unpaid labour services, Dusadhs are similar to other local classes of labour.

Chamar: All forty-one Chamar households are in Baaspur. With the exception of four households which are characterised as petty producers, all other households are understood as classes of labour. Petty producer households are engaged in a mix of subsistence and commercial (on a small scale) agriculture. Only ploughing operations are mechanised. Agriculture is based on family labour, including men and women. Two of these four households undertake livestock rearing as a commercial activity. There are no examples of non-agricultural self-employment, local wage labour or migrant work. Petty producer Chamar households either had or have a member in public employment which has had an important bearing on their comparatively better economic status vis-à-vis Chamars belonging to the classes of labour. For example, in one household, the retired male household head receives a pension of three thousand rupees per month. His son works as a teacher. In another household, the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law are widows. The latter is an *anganwadi* (not a regular, pensioned government service, but a better alternative as explained previously) worker (the job was ‘got’ through her brother-in-law who himself was in public employment) and receives seventeen hundred rupees per month. In the third household, the male household head was in the CRPF⁸⁸. In the fourth household, a male member is in police service.

It is usually the case that irrespective of caste, upward economic mobility is associated with social seclusion of women. This is true of these households as well, but it is influenced by other factors. For example, the two widows are involved in own cultivation, but not the wife of the former CRPF man. So, the availability of male family labour is a determinant of female labour participation. The widowed *anganwadi* worker cannot afford to live in seclusion. However, the economic vulnerability is not as extreme as in the case of Chamar female labourers who are extensively involved in agricultural wage labour. With the exception of one household (the one whose male head was in the CRPF), female members of others freely move and interact in the hamlet. These households are unlikely to undertake livelihood activities. They reflect greater investment in education and land. For example, a sixteen year old daughter in one household was still in school, children in another household went to private schools and in one other case the household had purchased

⁸⁸ Central Reserve Police Force

land in the past. These are not accumulating households who have managed to consolidate their position, but they have managed to maintain and provide for the household on a simple basis and therefore can be understood as petty producers.

Among Chamar households belonging to classes of labour, agriculture is subsistence oriented and combined with small-scale sugarcane cultivation in few cases. One household had sown carrots which would be bought by a Baniya from a neighbouring village who would sell them. Agriculture is organised on family and exchange labour. Both men and women (young women work only where other family labour is unavailable) are involved in it, as they are in livestock rearing for commercial purposes. One household owned a plough and oxen and a male member worked as a ploughman.

Non-agricultural self-employment is rare. One man is a rickshaw puller, another a cobbler (earning ten to fifteen rupees per day) and one is a tailor (hundred to hundred and fifty rupees per day) who works from a rented shop in a local market. Only one girl was involved in non-agricultural self-employment as a home-based tailor. She had recently learned tailoring and could only do simple designs. Rather than as source of income, the skill was acquired for personal use; stitching and embroidery are skills usually taught to young girls of marriageable age. The girl's mother complained that now people own machines and either stitch at home or prefer to give clothes for stitching in the market.

Local labour commodification is extensive. Agricultural wage labour is the most common type of female and male labour commodification. Even young married women undertake agricultural wage labour, except in rare cases where there are other family members to support the household. Men undertake non-agricultural casual labour, in construction, assisting roofers or in a shop or loading/unloading sugarcane during harvest season. There one or two isolated and irregular cases of men working in brick kilns during season. They carry head loads of bricks for four to five rupees per head load. A man was an apprentice with a compounder (his work profile was explained as taking medicines to different places) and he was paid one thousand to two thousand rupees per month. There were two examples, where men were learning

tailoring at different shops in a market and they were either paid a petty amount or were given some snacks every few days.

Two older Chamar women are engaged in their traditional occupation, in addition to wage labour. They assist in child birth and travel considerable distances to do so. They may be remunerated with clothes, grains, token amount and at times with a goat or a nose-ring or anklet. On special occasions like wedding, some Chamar women are called upon to sing at functions and they may be paid a token amount and/or are served food and sweets. They are not only important sources of income and food, but an integrated part of the fabric of village life. Women pointed out that they undertake these activities because of ‘vyvhar’ (literally meaning behaviour and implying general social relations here) i.e. referring to the common community bond and as wage labourers.

Over half the Chamar labouring households had male members in migrant work. They were mostly involved in casual labour, some in weaving, welding, stitching, agriculture (in sugarcane farms, tending to livestock), one worked in a soap factory and one in an iron rolling mill. As is the case generally, these migrants started off with villagers or relatives and in few cases with contractors from nearby areas. Like the Dusadh migrants, migration in Chamars is not stable. It is a survival activity and workers take up whatever work they can get. Several of them spoke of overhead expenses like room rent, low paid overtime work, living with many others in small accommodation, long work shifts etc.

Regarding livelihood activities, social conduct of women and unpaid labour services, Chamars are similar to other local classes of labour.

Conclusions: Several conclusions can be drawn from the above mapping exercise.

(i) Though there is some economic variation within castes, caste and class overlap to a great extent in both villages.

Table 5.6. Caste-class Overlap in Sapatganj

<i>Jati</i>	Petty Capitalist	Petty Producer	Classes of Labour
Rajput	1		
Gupta		11	
Teli		3	
Ahir	1 ⁸⁹	32	
Koeiri (Khushwaha)		2	
Ansari (Muslim)		14	
Kharwar (Kamkar)			7
Dhobi			10
Dusadh			14 ⁹⁰
Total No. of Households- 96	2	62	31

Table 5.7. Caste-class Overlap in Baaspur

<i>Jati</i>	Petty Capitalist	Petty Producer	Classes of Labour
Pandit			1
Brahmin	1	5	
Rajput	8		
Thakur		3	
Kayasth		8	
Mian (Muslim)		4	
Ansari (Muslim)		4	
Koeiri (Khushwaha)		23	
Hajjam		3	
Kharwar			23
Dhobi (Dalit)			5
Dusadh (Paswan) (Dalit)			9

⁸⁹ This is the pradhan's household (see pg. 18).

⁹⁰ There are a total of fifteen Dusadh households but one's status is ambiguous because of limited access. It could either be classified as a petty capitalist below the pradhan's household or a well-off petty producer household (see pg. 24).

Chamar (Dalit)		4	37
Total No. of Households 138	9	54	75

In both, Sapatganj and Baaspur, petty capitalists are the upper castes. In both villages, petty producers are predominantly the OBCs, but a fair number of upper castes are petty producers as well. A miniscule number of dalit households are petty producers. With one exception, all dalit households, in both villages, belong to the classes of labour category.

Table 5.8: Occupational Patterns of Petty Producers in Sapatganj and Baaspur

Total number of households	Local wage labour	Self-employment (excluding agriculture and livestock rearing)	Migrant Work (at least one member of the household)
Sapatganj (66)	33	4	41
Baaspur (54)	23	15	18
Total (120)	56	19	59

Table 5.9: Occupational Patterns of Classes of Labour in Sapatganj and Baaspur

Total number of households	Local wage labour	Self-employment (excluding agriculture and livestock rearing)	Migrant Work (at least one member of the household)
Sapatganj (31)	26	9	18
Baaspur (75)	73	14	36
Total (106)	99	23	54

From tables 5.8 and 5.9 it is evident that dalits who are mostly classes of labour are preponderant in local wage labour.⁹¹ Only about half the petty producer household do wage labour. Self-employment activities are not common in either classes of labour or petty producers. Migrant work appears to be almost equally important for the two classes. The caste-wise disaggregated description, as provided above, nuances this overall picture. For example, along the lines of the type of migrant work undertaken, level of remittances and stability; whether self-employment activities are an indication of better resource base, ownership of productive assets and employ other labour or they are undertaken as a survival activity; extent of reliance on local wage labour etc. Furthermore, these nuances indicate that some petty producers (some Kayasth and Chamar households or Guptas) are better-off than Ahirs or Koeiris.

(ii) Village labour markets are organised along gender and caste lines. As pointed out above, majority of the local wage labourers are dalits. Occupational diversification has occurred only in the case of men. In this sense, it is indeed the case that a shift has occurred from agricultural labour to labour straddling different work spaces (Lerche, 2010). Related to this is the point that labour mobility and delocalisation of income resources has occurred in the case of men only. This is in line with Rigg (2006). Female labourers continue to work in agriculture only (with rare exceptions, mainly in cases of home based self-employment activities). Within agriculture, there is a further gendered division of labour. Women only do tasks like weeding, sowing, cutting sugarcane leaf tops, manual harvesting and threshing. Male labourers undertake all types of spade work. However, this sexual division of labour is not rigidly observed in own cultivation.

While relevant literature talks of the declining role of agriculture in the reproduction of small farmers (pp.19-21), fieldwork findings presented here bring out the need to be specific. Fieldwork findings indicate that while agriculture itself is not sufficient in securing household reproduction, it is a crucial minimum buffer against absolute

⁹¹ Figures mentioned in these tables should be taken as good estimates but not a rigid classification because household circumstances continuously change. For example, household members might be doing wage labour at the time of survey, but may stop doing wage labour with high and stable remittances over time; or a household not involved in wage labour, may take to it with worsening economic circumstances or in the absence of migrating male members or till the time remittances start coming in.

poverty and starvation. In the case of women, agriculture continues to be of utmost relevance. They are dependent on agricultural wage labour for the daily reproduction of the household, particularly in cases of migrant male members.

(iii) At a detailed level, a caste-class hierarchy, underscored by gender, is explicit in the local occupational structure.

At the top are the *badkas* or the upper caste-class i.e. petty capitalists. The types of self-employment activity (medical store owner), migrant work (medical store owner, dentist and a lawyer) and instances of public employment (as an engineer, doctor, a teacher and in the army), seen in their case, are indicative of a strong asset base, high educational investment, secure employment and high income and these are socially highly valued. At the other extreme, are the *chutkas* or the lower caste-class i.e. the classes of labour. The types of self-employment activities (home based general stores, bore-well digging operations, plying a push-cart, carrying brick loads on donkeys, small cycle repair shops etc), forms of labour commodification (agricultural and non-agricultural casual labour mainly) and migrant work associated with instability in terms of destination and types of work undertaken, oppressive terms and conditions of work and irregular and poor remittances, seen in the case of classes of labour, appear as a survival and coping mechanism to spread risk and maximise income sources.

Pursuit of occupational multiplicity by (male) classes of labour is definitely distress driven. But it is also an expression of freedom from the conditions of domination and subjugation characteristic of a village based agrarian life-style, especially where migrant work is concerned (For example, Guerin & Venkatasubramanian, 2009; Guerin et al., 2012). This is not the case for female labourers. As pointed out earlier, women from the classes of labour households continue to be agrarian. Not only relations of dominance and subjugation are common in agriculture, but agricultural wage labour, particularly the tasks performed by women, are the least paid and perceived as one of the most demeaning types of wage labour. Female wages are not perceived as 'breadwinner wage'. On top of this, livelihood activities are disproportionately undertaken by women and women also provide unpaid labour services. This corresponds with Lerche (2010) and Chen (2008): dalits are

disproportionately present in the classes of labour category, classes of labour are engaged in low status and least paying jobs and women are the worst off.

Using this description of the main socio-economic relations in the two villages, the following section describes the labour relations of dalit women from classes of labour households.

5.2. Rural Labour Relations of Dalit Women Belonging to Classes of Labour

This section will look at general and specific aspects of low-caste female labour relations.

Labour relations are a part of overall dependency cum survival relations. First, I will discuss the wider social relations by way of highlighting overlapping socio-economic relations in agriculture and more generally in the village, the rationale behind delivering unpaid labour services, impact of male out-migration and finally, how the idea of labour market is approached in a village setting.

The section then moves on to discuss the forms of female wage labour commodification and the wage structure (drawing on preceding section). How recruitment is organised and aspects of labour relations that serve as forms of labour control are also considered. How unfree labour relations manifest and underscore labour relations is looked into. Intra-labour relations are described and the role of caste, class, gender and locality reflected upon.

5.2.1. General Social Relations: An Overview

In agriculture and generally in the village, socio-economic relations (employer-labourer, credit, food security, patron-client relations) overlap. These relations closely follow the spatial pattern of the concerned village. Irrespective of contiguous physical boundaries or not, socio-economic relations do not follow village administrative boundaries. Much depends on factors like location, proximity, tied labour arrangements, caste, familiarity and shared history and socio-cultural restrictions circumscribing the participation of female labour.

In Sapatganj, the labouring households of the Ansari hamlet mostly did wage labour in a village bordering their hamlet. Dalit and Ahir classes of labour households in the main hamlet worked for the petty capitalists and petty producers of their own village and few from nearby villages for whom they had been working for years. Labouring households of the Ahir hamlet worked in a village neighbouring their hamlet. In Baaspur, petty capitalists and petty producers, who are the main employers of agricultural wage labour, are concentrated in two hamlets. Employers from the first hamlet call upon the Dhobis and Kharwars of their hamlet and the Chamars of the nearby second hamlet. Employers from the other hamlet, depend on the Dusadhs and Kharwars of their hamlet, Chamars from the second and to a lesser extent, Chamars from the fourth hamlet. The latter are largely involved in wage labour in another village closer to their hamlet. It should be noted that during peak agricultural season, factors like a standoff with local labour on wage rates temporarily influence these established routes as the employer may call upon outside labour on different terms and conditions.

Labouring households and ‘their’ employer households are usually located in close proximity. Over the years, labourers have been engaged in various social relations with them for purposes such as credit, food security, land leasing, enabling access to public resources like MGNREGA, bank credit under special schemes or the mediation with other government structures. For *badkas*, who are also politically dominant and therefore in a position to control access and distribution of scarce resources and ‘benefits’, these relations are a means to ensure an easily accessible, cheap and reliable workforce. Caste is important to the extent that labouring households from the OBC group tend to avoid working for lower caste labour-employing households or even work outside their ‘own village’. This is their way of avoiding social disgrace and embarrassment, retaining a sense of modesty, and social honour. These factors operate in Baaspur as well. In Baaspur, an additional factor reinforcing overlapping socio-economic relations of dependency is the control of space by the *badkas*. In many cases, *badkas* fields surround those of classes of labour. In one instance, the *pradhan* unlawfully acquired a dirt road through which few labouring households approached their fields. He cultivates sugarcane on the encroached land. The affected labourers are dependent upon him for access to their fields and this severely limits

their bargaining power vis-à-vis the pradhan. This pradhan is also a major employer in the village which contributes to his upperhand in all negotiations.

Related to the above is another example of general social relations: corruption as a routine fact of everyday life and as a source of accumulation for the politically powerful. In fact, it is the most dominant theme in labour's analysis and critique of local politics and is perceived as all pervasive, irrespective of party affiliation or whether the pradhan is a *badka* or *chutka*. As put by a female dhobi labourer (Baaspur), *bribery is a common practice*.⁹² *Irrespective of their castes, pradhans are motivated by self-interest only. The pradhan before the present one was a chutka. He was allocating abaadi land to the poor, but he was pressured by the badkas who opposed his decision* (Fieldwork notes, April 2010).

In both villages, it is common for villagers to grease the pradhan's palms with petty amounts for allocation of red BPL cards, MGNREGA job cards or IAY benefits. Nepotism is rife in accessing provisions like free tubewell/handpump boring for SCs or old age and widow pensions which anyway are intermittently disbursed. Less than the stipulated ration is distributed under PDS and this ration may later be sold on the black market for a higher amount. A percentage of the IAY allowance was retained by the pradhan prior to disbursement to the beneficiary. Payment for work done under MGNREGA is often delayed and there is discrepancy between the number of days worked and wages received.

In recent years, MGNREGA has become a major ground for labour dependency and subservience in both villages. The fact that the job cards are often with the pradhan, is a ground for manipulation and corruption. Even where labourers were paid wages in their own account, they are not aware of when the payment is made unless notified by the pradhan. As survival is dependent on the sale of their labour power daily, they cannot afford to waste both time and money in visiting banks which are located at some distance from the villages. Uncertainty over payments is exacerbated by the fact that payments are much delayed as first the entire work has to be completed and measured. Then there are other practical issues at hand which act as hindrance like, a

⁹² To quote her, '*ghoos ka jamana hai*'.

very limited awareness of their rights, labourers are not entertained by the bank staff, inability to do the paperwork themselves and being charged a hefty amount to open accounts which they cannot afford, though the accounts for these purposes are supposed to be opened free of charge. According to the Baaspur Pradhan, since the banks have to meet pre-determined targets, they are reluctant to open accounts free of charge as this is not profitable and also labourers usually withdraw the entire amount (which is not much) at one time, rather than keeping a deposit with the bank.

One Dusadh female labourer (Sapatganj) elaborated: *the present pradhan does not take hundred rupees per day wage of one who has worked in a MGNREGA job. Instead he goes to the bank with them, once in five or six months and gets the villagers to withdraw the entire unemployment benefit*⁹³. *He keeps this money which could be between seven thousand to eight thousand rupees. The pradhan gives a token amount to the account holder/beneficiary to buy alcohol. The bank personnel also side with the pradhan* (Fieldwork Notes, November 2009). In Baaspur, some beneficiaries still do not have bank accounts and wages are received and disbursed by the Pradhan, a major cause of labour dependency. This simultaneously provides the Pradhan with a channel to divert the funds. Labourers in Baaspur pointed out that it is possible that only a small part of the project (usually digging, paving a road) involved manual labour while the remaining was completed with the use of machines and fake entries made in job cards.

MGNREGA has had some indirect benefits though. The Baaspur pradhan pointed out that labourers now refused to do wage labour for less than hundred rupees per day. Respondents from both villages remarked that the government minimum wage has

⁹³ NREGA provides for unemployment benefit where it is unable to provide employment on demand. Men do approach the pradhan for job cards and work. However, it is unlikely that villagers are aware that NREGA is a demand driven programme. They approach the pradhan more in the hope that he will provide them with work when any such project is introduced. There have been NREGA projects around the villages. A very limited number of people were aware of the unemployment allowance clause called *baitthaki* (from the word sitting) locally and in fact, a criticism of NREGA has been its non-payment. As such, it is doubtful whether, the reference here is to wages received for work done or unemployment benefit received, particularly since this was not systematically investigated because NREGA was not the focus of study here. Rather, what was stated was taken at face value. Discrepancy between number of work days and wages received was clearly borne out by fieldwork: for one to receive six thousand rupees, one would have worked for sixty days, however, no villager in Sapatganj said they had worked for more than ten to fifteen days under the scheme. In Baaspur, the discrepancy was evident in the few jobs cards which were with the labourers and could be accessed. These cards had been returned to them after the wages had been collected. (see, Dreze & Khera, 2009; Dreze in Mahaprashasta, 2009).

pushed up the wages of casual male wage labour. However, MGNREGA has not made much of a difference where female labour is concerned, either in terms of wage labour participation or indirect impacts. In terms of the types of work available under it, MGNREGA has special provisions for female labour, but women are not aware of this (or other provisions for that matter). They are also unwilling to challenge the established gendered roles. Caste is another limitation as poor upper and middle castes are unwilling to take up work associated with dalit male labourers.

There are other examples of how corruption pervades socio-economic relations. According to another Dusadh female labourer (Sapatganj), under IAY, she *received an instalment of eighteen thousand of which she had to give three thousand and six hundred rupees to the pradhan. The remaining money will be received when a further two thousand rupees is paid. She was told by the pradhan that he would help her in getting Awaas money, if she paid him. He has to work hard to get the money-travelling and approaching authorities takes time and money and possibly there is some bribe involved.*⁹⁴ *People from rich caste groups like Rajputs, Guptas or Ahirs have got Awaas money, but from her caste group few have got. When they approach the pradhan, he tells them that will not be given Awaas money because they did not vote for him* (Fieldwork Notes, November 2009). In Baasapur, the ration for mid-day school meal was not stored at the primary school but distributed among pradhan, *aaganwadi* workers and few others. School meals were provided only once or twice a week. A lavish feast at the pradhan's house, attended by block level officers and gram sabha members, was immediately followed by the extension of the pradhan's tenure and postponement of panchayat elections. In both Sapatganj and Baasapur, villagers spoke of distribution of alcohol and clothes before elections as a means to purchase votes.

In view of the above grounds of dependency and the failure of male out-migration to substantively counteract the economic vulnerability of labouring households, delivering unpaid labour services to petty capitalists is crucial to classes of labour seeking access to resources, security and protection against socio-economic adversity and mitigate the omnipresent threat and fear of sanctions. These labour services are

⁹⁴ To quote her, '*usko daud-dhoop karni padti hai, tel-paani kharch hota hai, paisa do to awaas dilayenge.*'

mostly provided by dalit women and include scooping, washing and drying grain, tending to livestock, making cowdung cakes, sweeping the front yard etc. In few instances, women may be served food or just tea in return and if it is a ceremonial occasion then grain is given or a token amount is paid.

These standard practices provide security at a high cost. For example, in Sapatganj, a Dusadh migrant labourer fell out with his contractor who is also from the same village. The labourer returned without his due wages and subsequently he was paid less than the due amount. In his absence, his wife (on his advice) had borrowed money from the Rajput family to meet household and agricultural expenses. They were expecting to pay this through the remittance money. When this did not work out, both, the husband and wife did wage labour for them on a priority basis and at reduced wage rates. The wife also performed unpaid labour within their house. In Baaspur, a Chamar woman explained that though her family had repaid the debt they had incurred from a Rajput, they continued to provide wage labour to them on a priority basis and on less than the market wage rates. They fear that if they stopped doing this, the Rajput family would not help them in times of need in future. Another Chamar woman (Baaspur) complained that she and another woman had cleaned seven sacks of mustard at the *pradhan*'s house but instead of being given lentils which they could eat, they were given a measly twenty rupees each.

The fieldwork showed that there is an ongoing process of feminisation of agriculture in both villages. Feminisation of agriculture is limited to certain operations only (at least in the labour market; this is elaborated subsequently) and is linked to male out-migration. The fieldwork also showed that returning migrants are unwilling to take up agricultural work because it is demeaning, involved delayed wage payment or part payment and doing agricultural wage labour for *badkas* is a constant reminder of their inferior status. Non-agricultural male tasks (whether migrant or local work) are better paid than agricultural wage labour and owner-cultivation activities. Income from these is crucial in ensuring household reproduction. Female labour also cited the lure of city life and the hold of consumerism.⁹⁵ Spread of literacy is another reason. This

⁹⁵ Several respondents mentioned how the growing trend of consumerism puts an added pressure to provide better and more things-motorbikes instead of cycles, mobiles, televisions and CD players and more than anything else the burden of providing dowry for daughters and making elaborate ceremonial

has imbued a sense of confidence and self-esteem among the younger male generation of classes of labour. They do not want to be associated with humiliating and exploitative agrarian work or even to be seen taking livestock for grazing. A Chamar woman from Baaspur implicitly linked migration with masculinity. She commented that if her sons did wage labour in the village, they would be the subject of public rebuke: that as young and able men, they are doing wage labour in the village, rather than migrant work.⁹⁶ As stated previously, a sense of pride and accomplishment is attached with migration. For poor upper castes, it is a preferred alternative from local social humiliation.

Male outmigration has added to the work burden of female labour. To quote the female dhobi contractor from Sapatganj, 'it is difficult to manage household and agricultural work. There is no one to do spade work, to spray fertilizer or drop seeds.'⁹⁷ As put by a Baaspur female dhobi labourer, *male out-migration has increased the responsibility of women vis-à-vis own agriculture.....has to do all agricultural work by herself, hire a tractor for ploughing her field etc. Her husband, who operates a rice mill at home, helps out when he can. When he is not available, not only she has to do spade work in her field, but also harvest sugarcane and help load it. But in badka's fields she does not cut the sugarcane, only cuts the leaves because this is what women do.....she will not be physically able to cut sugarcane in badka's fields* (Fieldwork Notes, April 2010). Female labourers bear greater responsibility of household survival on a day to day basis: taking care of own cultivation i.e. buying agricultural inputs by incurring debt or through wage earnings, hiring tractors or irrigation facilities, providing exchange labour etc, in addition to actually farming the land; livestock responsibilities—milking, grazing, getting fodder; providing for daily family consumption; meeting health and school expenditures and combining care and reproductive economy responsibilities with wage work etc.

But, important decision-making powers on important social and economic issues related to weddings, land and credit remain firmly in the hands of men. It is claimed

arrangements. To finance this, often the relatives and friends of the concerned individual also borrow on their behalf as it is a matter of the honour and pride of the community/hamlet/village.

⁹⁶ To quote her, 'aisa deh le kar yeh kaam karte....bahar jaakar nahi kamate' (Fieldwork Notes, April 2010).

⁹⁷ As put by her, 'apna ghar ka kaam mein, kheti ke kaam mein pareshani hoti hain, Koi kodne ko, khaddar cheetne ko, beej cheetne ko nahi' (Fieldwork Notes, November 2009).'

by women that decisions pertaining to own cultivation are taken independently by them or jointly taken with male members of the household. In practice, this is hardly the case. Women stated that they independently decided what to cultivate, but when asked if their husbands had any input, they added that they of course ‘talked’ about it; some reacted with the question that why would they (women) not ask (husbands)?. Decisions involving money (hiring labour, tractor, tubewell/pipe), are generally taken by men and any ‘consultation’ with women is merely token. For example, my field assistant would call up her migrant husband and speak to him about tractor hiring, the prevailing rate, if she should borrow money to buy fertilizer etc. The actual buying and hiring of inputs involves movement outside the village, so male dependency is not completely eliminated. There are few cases where women have gone to the market (in the absence of male children or extended male family members in the village), to undertake some essential market work or to sell milk. As far as possible the older women of the house do this or if some other male is going from the village then he may be asked to do it.

This does not mean that female labour is not aware of how to undertake various agricultural operations or does not take independent decisions at all. It has more to do with the gendering of the social role of female labour as dependents and of men as household heads. In event of any crisis or urgent expenditure, women do independently approach the wife of the male head of their ‘patron’ household. A specific example is from Baaspur. A dhobi woman’s husband owns a cycle shop. Its stock has been bought on credit. In the beginning the shop did well but as more such shops came up, income declined. He is also an alcoholic and abusive man who does not like his wife undertaking wage labour and presses her to do only housework. She however refuses. She does what she thinks is the best for only then will she be able to save money to pay off the debt. She independently takes decisions regarding the sale of livestock and sold a cow for eight thousand rupees and a goat for two thousand and five hundred rupees. Her husband does not help her. One other consequence of male out migration is that the mobility and actions of the female members of these households has come under closer scrutiny and is consistently monitored by the villagers. This is discussed subsequently.

In Baaspur, an additional consequence of migration (related to the above point) is the control exerted by comparatively successful male migrant workers on the wage labour participation of their women relatives. They see themselves as proud 'breadwinners', securers of household reproduction. Therefore, from their perspective, their female family members no longer need to undertake degrading agricultural wage labour. Women do not agree with this, given the uncertain and fluctuating remittances and continue to do wage labour, albeit discreetly when the migrant worker is away; or when their economic condition is worsened and their survival is threatened; and/or they stop undertaking unpaid labour services. This is a case of female labourers being pragmatic without antagonising male authority and position.

To cite one example, a Chamar widow (Baaspur) discontinued with agricultural wage labour and unpaid labour services on her migrant son's insistence. But she does wage labour when he is away. When he is at home, she may try and do wage labour behind his back or organise and send labour for some job. However, she now does wage labour in own village only. Apart from the need factor, this can also be perceived as maintaining old socio-economic relations which serve as a safety net in times of need and a way to avoid an open confrontation.

Finally, regarding the labour markets in the field villages, an important factor vis-à-vis labour relations is the absence of a space (market) where labourers compete to find productive employment. Labour markets operate at different levels and have varying scope. At the most micro-level is the daily labour market in urban areas i.e. usually labourers gather in one location (market in this sense) from where employers take labourers according to their requirements. In the field villages, labourers do not actively search for work, women particularly. Even during peak agricultural season, women wait for work to come by their way through an employer directly or a contractor. Though men do not actively seek wage employment in the village, their mobility and visibility in public spaces make them more accessible and approachable.

There are three possible reasons for this 'passivity' of female labour. One reason is that in the context of relatively 'closed setting' of the village and a 'fixed' subject operating within the 'village' boundaries, it is more a case of employers knowing who to approach for what work. The second reason has to do with restrictions on female

mobility and their social interaction. Related to this is the third reason, that actively searching for wage labour in a village is 'atypical'. As explained by a male dhobi labourer (Baaspur),⁹⁸ *in villages, going out in search for work is associated with 'sharm' (shame). This is not the case in towns like Kasiya, Gorakhpur or Lucknow* (Fieldwork Notes, April 2010). It is seen as embarrassing and dishonouring the family and particularly the male head.

The next section is a discussion on specific aspects of rural labour relations of female labourers belonging to the classes of labour.

5.2.2. Specific Aspects of Dalit Rural Female Labour Relations

The specific aspects dealt with here are: types of female labour commodification and wage relations, recruitment patterns, forms of labour control, unfree labour relations and intra-labour relations.

5.2.2.1. Agricultural Labour Commodification and Wage Relations

It is apparent from the mapping of occupational patterns in Sapatganj and Baaspur that female labour is agrarian. There are several reasons for the lack of occupational diversification among female labourers. Similar reasons are cited for both villages.

One explanation is the threat of public censure for violating socio-cultural traditions and backlash from their families. An added dimension is that these repressive controls are more stringently operative in the absence of migrating male family members. For example, local female labourers do not work in brick kilns even though it is better waged work. This is because brick kiln work is even more stigmatised than agricultural wage labour. But moreover, their working at kilns would generate gossip among villagers that she wanders in search of work behind her husband.⁹⁹ This gossip tantamount to inviting contempt and reproach on the family. Female labourers' involvement in kilns, would be taken as a reflection of inability of their husbands to

⁹⁸ 'Dehaat, dehaat hai aur shahar, shahar hain', said the labourer.

⁹⁹ This is expressed in female labourers common refrain: 'shikayat laagi ki aadmi ke peeche ghoom-ghoom kar kaam kari'.

adequately provide for the family and the loose character of women who cannot make ends meet within their husband's earnings. Such work would require female labourers to be mobile and work in company of strange men which is a non-starter anyways. Drinking and physical harassment are common problems in kilns which scare and further discourage local women.

On further prodding of the issue, women become belligerent. They retorted if, as a woman, I would be able to do such work? They also mocked and belittled incoming migrant female labour (from Ranchi) working at kilns. These migrant women were derided for their peculiar style of draping saris, carrying children on their backs while working, working in the company of unknown men, as loud mouthed and abusive and for manufacturing and selling alcohol to other migrants and locals.¹⁰⁰

They are the opposite of local female ideal type: male dependents; wearing saris in a traditional manner with their heads covered; not engaging in verbal fights or being abusive (not entirely true of dalit women, from what was seen in the field); not challenging the gendered division of labour or established gender roles; working with familiar female companions, employers and operating within a limited geography etc. According to a female Chamar labourer from Baaspur who had worked as a migrant worker but since last fourteen years has been based in the village, local women are not used to any non-agricultural work and therefore they cannot do these. Incoming female labour from Ranchi can do non-agricultural wage labour as in brick kilns or carrying head loads because this is what they have been doing since childhood. They also work as a family. From this it is inferred that the presence of 'family' (read husbands or male members) legitimates women working in kilns or for that matter, any non-agricultural occupation. It is also inferred that with a family working together as a unit, the burden of work is shared. This is seen in the third village where women work along side their husband in kilns as unpaid attached labour.

The traditional way of village life is itself a limitation. In comparison to a village, caste, religious and gender identities are diluted in cities and towns. Female labourers remarked that in urban locations, women do non-agricultural wage labour.

¹⁰⁰ Alcohol drinking is particularly perceived as an economic and social menace by local women. Men spend a significant portion of their earnings on alcohol and are also known to get abusive when drunk.

Sapatganj's Dhobi contractor asserted that she would also have done the same in a town.¹⁰¹ Several other respondents and villagers in general agreed with this. Few women from Sapatganj, pointed out that, in a nearby town, women washed alcohol bottles and made bangles. But such opportunities are not available to female labour in countryside and even if they went to cities they would not be able to get work because they lack intellect, general awareness and confidence.

The passivity of female labour, limited awareness, the complete absence of women in brick kilns, MGNREGA or non-agricultural work and absence of contractors to recruit and pay female labourers (as is the case in agriculture) are also reasons for lack of female non-agricultural employment. Sapatganj's Dusadh contractor expressed that *she has not benefitted from this new source of employment (MGNREGA) because no one calls her for this work. Women come from other areas and do such work. But their pradhan says that women will not be able to do such work. They have never approached any authority above the pradhan, like at the Block level, over this because she cannot go alone and she does not know whom to approach and where. No one would support her. Also, how can she possibly lift head loads of mud and grit if no one takes the contract and responsibility because otherwise if she went, then who would pay her? The men from this village, who are involved in such work, do not ask women. She would feel shy to work with them and would only go if many of other women go as well* (Fieldwork Notes, December 2009).

Practice of traditional occupations (Hajams as barbers, a Chamar as a cobbler, Brahmins as priests) is one source of non-agricultural work, possibly one in which female labour participation would not be questioned or circumscribed. But there are rare examples of this. One example of this was a Dhobi woman and her husband, from Baasapur, who previously engaged in their caste based occupation (washerman). In Sapatganj, the wife of a Dhobi assisted in ironing clothes (within the village). However, with the changing circumstances, evolving labour market and consumer preferences, this work has fallen into obsolescence. To cite the example of the dhobi couple, *both worked as dhobis till about ten years ago. They were remunerated in kind for this type of work. About nine kilos of rice was given by each customer every*

¹⁰¹ To quote her, 'Town hota to na' (Fieldwork Notes, November, 2009).

six months or so. Clothes were washed at a dhobi ghaat which was later acquired by the then pradhan. In addition to land dispossession, they now have no access to water as the village pond is dry. People are more fancy and conscious now. Earlier people would bathe when the dhobi returned clean clothes, now they bathe everyday. Surf (detergent) is widely available. People wear synthetic clothes which are easy to wash (Fieldwork Notes, April, 2010).

By now it is apparent that notions of family honour and respect are strongly attached to the economic and social conduct of women. This, together with caste, inhibits diversification of female labour out of agriculture. It is the given duty of men to provide for their families. In this sense, occupational diversification is necessary and preferred to oppressive village based agrarian relations. But providing for households is not a role traditionally ascribed to women. Moreover, as stressed by Dhobi female labourer from Sapatganj, *no one from this village worked in kilns because they cannot do such intense physical labour. They feel shy. What if a relative saw them moulding bricks while their husbands sit at home? Ranchinis (female labour from Ranchi), don't feel shy because this work is done by their caste group. If she was to wash others clothes, no one would remark on it because her caste does this work. But if a Dusadh was to do it, it would be shameful ('sharm, laaj'). Rather than working in kilns, it is better to incur debt and sit idle at home* (Fieldwork Notes, December 2009). In Sapatganj, an Ahir woman once washed the dirty dishes of my host (Rajput) family, but only after she closed the doors of the house so that no outside person could just walk in and see her.

The points mentioned above attest that economic discrimination is closely linked to gendered relations and caste identity. But the language of discrimination does not figure prominently among female labourers explanations of their exclusion from occupational diversification. It is not a matter of questioning the structural context or challenging the existing power relations. For them, this is how the order of things has always been, what they are used to and identify with.

As agricultural wage labour, dalit female labourers have been adversely affected by agricultural transformations like mechanisation, displacement of wages in kind with cash wages, use of chemical inputs and landowners taking to cultivation themselves. I

cite one example here, though these points were raised by most respondents from both villages.

A female Dhobi labourer from Baaspur narrated: *since the badkas started using combines for harvesting, not much wage labour is available in katni (harvesting). As cash was not very common, wages were paid in kind. Badkas have large family and they want to save grain for household consumption and now if they have a surplus, they prefer to sell it. When harvesting was manual, she could earn up to ten bhojas. Now men migrate out to earn and they have to live on that. Chutka employers themselves do katni manually....they are concerned with saving money and therefore, do katni themselves. They would rather spend the saved money on food and not labour wages. Now those who have a little more than ten kathas, may hire labour. These are placed slightly lower than babu log (badkas).... It was better when wages were paid in kind. Labourers would bring the received grain home, grind it and eat it for two days. Now they get cash wage, go to the market to purchase something and the money is all consumed.....In comparison to before, less wage labour is available in sohini (weeding) also. Badkas spray pesticide because of which grass dries. Only in conditions of moisture, will grass grow and there will be need for weeding. Decline in the availability of agricultural employment has led to problems of food and money ('khaane ki pareshani, paise ki pareshani')* (Fieldwork Notes, April, 2010).

The wage structure and relations are very similar in Sapatganj and Baaspur. It is clear that a gendered division of labour keeps female labour tied to agriculture. Within agriculture, they only undertake certain tasks: sowing (*rupani*), weeding (*sohni*), harvesting and threshing (rice and wheat) and cutting sugarcane leaves on *geda* or paid labour basis.¹⁰² This sexual division of tasks is backed by explanations referring to physical features of the male and female body. Female labour explained that men cannot stoop or sit for long periods of time, in positions, required for sowing or weeding. These tasks are the least paying agricultural operations in Sapatganj and Baaspur. One explanation for low wages is that these tasks are mostly done on a daily wage basis which does not pay as much as contract based work which is common in

¹⁰² Sugarcane harvesting is mostly done on *geda* basis. Labourers are hired when the quality of sugarcane is poor (basically if leaves have dried; labourers have no use of these and therefore do not cut such sugarcane on *geda* basis) or where sugarcane cultivation is extensive, as in the case of petty capitalists. In the latter case also, a significant portion is harvested on *geda* basis.

male tasks (I return to this point below). Moreover, regulations on female mobility mean that they can only undertake the locally available wage labour and local jobs are likely to be daily waged rather than contract based. Female labour is unlikely to be awarded contract based work because it cannot do as much labour as men. Another explanation for higher wage rates of male agricultural tasks is that these require greater physical labour.

As the Sapatganj female dusadh contractor put it¹⁰³, *fifteen rupees are paid for weeding because one sits and does it, rupani involves pulling out seedlings and then sowing them, therefore twenty rupees are paid for it. One does spade work for the entire day on just water. By the end of the day, both arms swell and the body aches, so wouldn't one ask for sixty rupees* (Fieldwork Notes, December, 2009)? An Ansari woman¹⁰⁴ from Baaspur also attested that *men undertake spade work and the tasks performed by women involve less hard-work and labour* (Fieldwork Notes, April 2010).

Female labour rationalises that their inferior physical strength prevents them from undertaking male agricultural tasks. However, in own cultivation, women may sometimes do these tasks as here they are not subjected to pressures of time or contract. Rather, they can work at their own pace with rest breaks. While true, this should not be read as undermining the role of gendered social relations.

Employers account for the low wage rates of female labour in terms of women not being serious workers and for playing truant from work. Employers explained that they have to call upon female labourers several times before they actually turn up for work. They halt or abandon work in between and 'disappear' to tend to other tasks. This is true to some extent as domestic chores and care and reproductive economy duties are solely the responsibility of women and have to be managed alongside wage labour demands and needs. Local employers rationalise low wages for local labour in terms of labour also accessing their fields for various purposes (grazing livestock,

¹⁰³ To quote her, 'sohni pandrah rupaye hain kyunki baith kar karte hain; rupani mein pehle beej ukhadte hain, phir raupate hain, is liye bees rupiye hain; kudari paani peekar din bhar chhalate hain, dono haat phool jaate hain, dahi dard karat hain, to saat rupiye nahi maange ge?'

¹⁰⁴ As put by her, 'hum mard hai, kudari chhalate hai, aurat kam mehnat ka kaam karti hai'.

cutting grass for fodder, defecation). The Sapatganj Rajput family defended that bhumihars do not have the paying capacity to pay the minimum wage.

As stated above, female labour is largely employed on a daily wage rate basis. In paddy transplantation, they are employed on a piece-rate basis. Contractual work is comparatively more profitable but only male tasks are likely to be given on contract. Regarding contract work, a female Chamar (Baaspur) labourer pointed out that '*the fewer the men, the better it is*' (Fieldwork Notes, April 2010). According to her, if two men are contracted for *kudni* (spade work) of five *kathas* for hundred or two hundred rupees, this is split equally between them. This is more than what they would have made working on daily wages i.e. fifteen rupees per *katha* (and according to one estimate, not more than two to three *kathas* can be done in a day) or a flat rate of forty to sixty rupees per day (wages given by the Baaspur Pradhan for *kudni*). Female labourers explained that spade work required more stamina and since, in terms of output, men can achieve more than women, they are recruited on contract basis.

In few cases female labour may be recruited for contractual work outside the village. A female Chamar labourer (Baaspur) explained that if there is less *khar* (dry grass, weeds), then four or five women may decide to take up the work on contract basis. If they have been contracted for two days, they finish it in one and a half days only, make a profit and then move onto the next job. In this case, wage payment is timely. Generally, the employer gives wages to the contractor who then distributes among labour. But if *Khar* is more, then it is done on daily wage basis only.

On the whole though, male labour is predominant in contract wage labour. A male dhobi labourer (Baaspur) pointed out that *in contract work wages are paid timely at the completion of the work. In daily wage work, payments are more often than not delayed. Employers say that they do not have cash at home, have to go to the bank etc and they pay several days after the completion of the work* (Fieldwork Notes, April, 2010). Therefore, it is not only that as daily wage labourers' female labour is paid less but benefits of contract work like timely payment elude them also. It can be inferred that contract work is less humiliating because it does not involve having to ask for due wages time and again. Part wage payment could be a ground for labour's continued

dependency on the concerned employer. Contract work does away with this possibility.

In most of the cases, sowing and weeding are tasks that can be done in one day. In few cases, where it takes two to three days to complete a job, wages are likely to be paid at the completion of work though there is no hard and fast rule and wages are in fact much delayed. However, if any labourer needs money before, she can approach the employer directly. In case of employers from outside it is common practice to pay the labour at the end of the work day. The employer may come to the field at the end of the work day and give the full amount to the contractor/lead person for distribution among the labourers or the labourers may go to the employer's household at the end of the work day to collect their wages.

During 'season' time, a tight labour market is not uncommon. With respect to female labour one example is in paddy transplantation. Wage negotiations are particularly strong at this time, when it is important that paddy be transplanted at the right time. Also because wage rates are unlikely to change once fixed at the start of a season. There is no well structured strategy played out by an organised labour force. Rather, it comes across as a casual and impromptu effort by some labourers. It is usually the case that at the start of the season, labourers talk amongst themselves their wages should be increased in keeping with the rising living costs and regional or extra-local wage hikes. The more aggressive of these labourers may suggest that wages should be increased by a certain amount and the others tend to agree. The quote is about five to ten rupees over the last season's wage rate. As the Baaspur pradhan put it, labourers' are united in their decision not work for those who pay less.¹⁰⁵ However, it was evident in interviews with female labourers, that there is always the fear that if they haggle too much, someone else from the village will go and do the work or that the employer will recruit labour from another hamlet or village. This was expressed by the Sapatganj dhobi contractor as such: *they will sit at home for two days and then return to work for the same employer or any where else where they might be*

¹⁰⁵ 'Unity bana li hai ki kam denge to uska kaam nahi karenge'.

employed because what else is there to do in the village (Fieldwork Notes, November 2009)?¹⁰⁶

When an employer calls upon a contractor or the main/lead female labourer, usually at their home, some face to face haggling follows. If the employer does not agree to a raise or a mutual agreement is not reached labourers may refuse. An agreement may be reached between the employer and contractor, but when the contractor approaches the labourers, the latter may press the contractor into further bargaining with the employer. She would then have to approach the employer again. Negotiations also take place the next day, at the field, as labourers try to wheedle and argue the employer into increasing the wage. Where no agreement is reached, the employer may have to hire labour from outside the village. This is an expensive alternative because these labourers are paid more and have to be served with water and food also. Ultimately employers have to return to local labour which is cheaper, easily accessible and more regularly available. If arrangements with outside labour so not work out, the employer again approaches local labourers and agrees to a slight increase. Labourers agree to work for this rate, because if they have been unemployed for some time, they cannot afford to let any wage labour opportunity go waste. Labourers may also factor in socio-economic ties of dependency, particularly, if the employer is a *badka*. In this case, labour unity in demanding wage hikes may be fragmented or fragile to begin with.

But haggle they (all labourers) do. As put by the Sapatganj dhobi contractor, *the older generation was scared of badkas, but not now. Now the badkas may get irritated, but then they come around.* 'If one has to live in the village then what of arrogance, *badka babu* (the eldest son of the Rajput family who takes care of agriculture) sometimes gets angry but then after few days comes to our doorstep (Fieldwork Notes, November 2009).'¹⁰⁷ Another female Dusadh labourer explained that if *badka babu* was to call her for some work, she would ask for a raise. She may even refuse to go for work, if he did not agree. But then there is no point in sitting at home. Some other labourers.....might take on the job. She would be angry with these labourers but

¹⁰⁶ 'Do din ghar par bethenge, phir uske paas kaam par chale jaayenge, kahi aur kaam milega to vha chale jaayenge. Aur dehat, gaon mein kya karenge?'

¹⁰⁷ 'Jab yaha rehna hai, to kya ghamand, badka babu khisyaat jaat hai, phir dwar par aate hain thode din baad.'

after few days things would be back to normal between them. Some time later, badka babu himself may again have to call her for work when others have refused (Fieldwork Notes, December, 2009).

In general, wage hike demands take the shape of negotiations and not open confrontation. The wage rate set by the first petty capitalist to recruit labour becomes the standard rate for the season. This is the case for the region. Employers stick to the rate thus set and in fact, they among themselves also consult and decide rates.¹⁰⁸ It appears that female labour wages increase by about Rs5 every season.

The Sapatganj female Dusadh labourer described the wage negotiation process as such: *A contractor attempts to negotiate wage at the time she is approached by the employer or someone on his behalf. Once informed about the task and the land size, she would quote a particular sum and the number of labourers that would be required. The employer would then say that if others pay that much, then he would also pay that. She would then emphasise that everywhere they get that amount and he should also give the same amount. If the employer agrees, she organises a labour group and does the work next day. If the employer does not agree, she may refuse to take on the work and tell the employer to get labour from somewhere else.*¹⁰⁹ *At times, the employer may not agree in the first instance and leave without finalising anything. After giving it some thought, the employer may approach her again. Then she would coax him in a gentle voice that if he were to give them the earlier stated amount, she would do his work as well*¹¹⁰. *The employer would then benevolently tell her that he would pay that wage (the quoted wage) and she should get the job done ('Chali, de denge, hamar kaam kar de'). However, if she has gone without wage labour for some time, then she might agree to a lesser amount* (Fieldwork Notes, December 2009).

From Baasapur, a female dhobi labourer explained the process as such: *...the rate set at the start of the season, remains throughout the season. When the employer calls upon a labourer, some haggling still takes place. Labourers argue with prospective*

¹⁰⁸ This is so according to the interviewed female labourers but it seems unlikely where the main employers in the same village are often at loggerheads.

¹⁰⁹ To quote her, 'Khethaar (landowner) se kehta hain itna paisa mili to hamar jana jaayega, varna jaakar kahi aur se dhood le'.

¹¹⁰ 'A babu, humko de na utna, to tumhar kamo kar di.'

employers or contractors that since everything in the shops have become so expensive, their wages should also increase. Any one labourer who has a sharp mind and can speak up may take the initiative to demand higher wages. Labourers spread, by word of mouth, the wages to be demanded and decide among themselves that they will not go for work, unless this is agreed. If the wage offered by the landowner is too less, not enough to provide for food, labourers refuse the job. Employers may hire labour from outside the village, but there is no friction between own village labourers and these. However, after a while, some of the local labour will return to work for lower wages. At times, a low-caste employer may increase the wage and consequently the other employers will have to offer same wages. In demanding wage hikes, labourers may present a unified stand against lower-caste employers. This is not the case vis-à-vis badka employers and anyways they would not increase wages because they provide employment on a more regular basis (Fieldwork Notes, April 2010).

Wage rates are more or less fixed, but can vary slightly due to several reasons. If the employer is from outside the village, labour has more scope for bargaining the terms and conditions and in most cases of employment outside the village, wage rates are relatively higher. Female labour takes advantage of the fact that the employer is unable to secure local labour, given the critical timing of the agricultural work like in paddy transplantation and the long distance labourers have to travel. Also, female labourers have to get up very early in the day to tend to domestic chores and other household responsibilities or forsake or delay or pass them onto children for the day. In the case of local employers, the socio-economic dependency restricts scope of bargaining. In Baasapur, a Chamar woman who operated as a contractor mentioned that she might take advance from an outside employer as security against the possibility of delayed wage payment. Because the employer does not live in the village, he will not be easily accessible in case of delayed wage payment. Advance in contract work did not come up in interviews with Sapatganj labourers.

Labour interviews in both villages highlighted that OBC and lower caste employers are likely to pay (five to ten rupees) more than the going rate as an incentive to secure labour for timely and efficient work. These employers hire in irrigation sources and can afford limited amounts of fertilizer and pesticides. To make the most of inputs, they need to ensure labour availability in peak season time, particularly in paddy

cultivation. They would rather incur higher labour costs than let the crop be affected or bear the expense of hiring in pump-sets for longer durations. They pay on time and give labourers cold water and something to eat when they are working in the fields. Several labourers suggested that these employers empathise with them as they understand the problems and needs of labourers. As a Baaspur female Chamar labourer put it, ‘only a *chutka* can understand another *chutka*’s problems (Fieldwork Notes, April 2010)’¹¹¹. According to her, lower-caste employers give wages before labourers ask for it.

According to another labourer from Baaspur, labourers can negotiate with OBC and lower-caste employers on a more even basis: they can even fight and verbally abuse lower-caste employers, but not the upper-caste employers. According to a Sapatganj Ahir female labourer, it is also the case that labourers will not accept low wages from lower caste employers because in times of need, their source of relief is *badlkas*, which privileges his status unlike lower-caste employers. According to the Sapatganj Dhobi contractor, ‘in case of any need or emergency, the *badkas* will help, but of what help can the *chutkas* be without the resources? In *chutkas* fields, one does wage labour and comes back home (Fieldwork Notes, November 2009).’¹¹² She denied any difference between OBC or lower caste employers and upper caste employers on the basis of wage rates, but implicit in her assertion is the differential attitudes labour adopts towards employers on the basis of their castes. This can also be taken as a reflection of the fact that wage rates are not the only consideration on the basis of which labour takes up a particular wage employment opportunity. Also, given that OBCs and lower castes or the petty producers, are a very small source of employment in comparison to the *badkas*, employment from petty producers has not mitigated dependency of the classes of labour on petty capitalists.

5.2.2.2. Modes of Recruitment

In Sapatganj and Baaspur, whether work is local or undertaken outside the village, women work in the company of women only. One or two familiar men or young boys

¹¹¹ ‘*Chutka hi jaanta hai dusre chutka ke pareshani.*’

¹¹² ‘*Badka se kabhi koi kaam fasa, koi jarorat padi, emergency hui, to badka madad karega, chhut kya karega? Koi sadhan ho to na, uske khet mein to majoori karo aur bas apne ghar chali aayi.*’

(relatives of female labourers) may be included, especially when women are working in a different village. This is seldom the case as men are concentrated in different kinds of agricultural tasks, travel much further than women and are more likely to be engaged in contractual and not daily wage work; most of them are also migrants and unavailable. Group work provides a sense of security to women when they are working in a different village. In familiar reliable company there is less threat of social monitoring by other community members. Women also feel less inhibited. They enjoy the company of friends and relatives at work. If one was to go alone, other women would taunt and accuse her for working and earning for herself and not taking others with her. Paddy transplantation is also not a job which can be done by only one person. In own village, women may work individually.

In both villages, with the exception of paddy sowing, agricultural operations undertaken by female labour are remunerated on a daily wage basis. However, if the work is done outside the village, weeding and sowing may be given on contract. In own village, it is easy for employers to individually call upon labour and supervision costs are not high. For outside employers it is easy to rely on a contractor given the distance and lack of familiarity.¹¹³ In either case, the employer's servant can also approach the labour, but this is not common, particularly in local work.

The starting point in the recruitment process is the employer, whether local or from outside the village. In daily wage works he individually calls upon labourers. In piece-rate based paddy transplantation or rare local cases where weeding work is contracted out, the employer, contacts a female labour who may have worked for him before or who lives nearby and who is capable of organising a team of labourers. This female labourer in effect becomes the '*thekedar*' (contractor) or is called the main or lead labourer. The employer provides the contractor or the lead labourers with details about the work to be done. The latter then quotes the number of labourers that would be required and the expected wage rate. This takes place at the contractor's house and involves some haggling between the two on wage-rate. Later the same day, the contractor or lead labourer approaches other labourers. From the contractor, labourers

¹¹³ An elderly Ahir woman distinguished this from recruitment few decades earlier. Then Bhumihars would seldom come to labourers door, rather recruitment was routed through their servants who were also responsible for supervision.

seek information about the specific task to be done, wage-rate, location and whether they be given water and food.

In Sapatganj, two rather well-defined contractors (a Dhobi and a Dusadh widow) exist¹¹⁴ and each has their work group. Both these contractors reside in the main settlement of the village and their parties draw mostly on classes of labour from this settlement, with few exceptions. Work parties remain same throughout a season. However, it is also common that they labourers fall out with their contractor over wages and then go to work with another work group and in the next season return to working for the previous contractor. Depending upon the scale of the work, the two contractors may either recruit only their favourites or if the demand is large the two contractors and their teams may work together. In this case the contractors first meet for advice and discussion and together take a decision on the job, wages, number of labourers required, who to call upon etc.

In comparison, Baaspur does not have organised labour parties. The labourers of Baaspur attributed the small size of their village. But Baaspur is only slightly larger than Sapatganj. However, the latter does not have contiguous boundaries and the dominant perception is that Sapatganj and its two neighbouring villages constitute one village (socio-economic relations also cut across these villages). This impression is reinforced by the fact that the three villages share one panchayat. The Baaspur labourers extended no clear reason as to what the size of the village has to do with workers being organised or not. However, there are several differences between the two villages which provide a more plausible reason. Sapatganj has fewer labouring households. One way the contractors can secure labour supply in times of seasonal peaks is by organising work groups. They also pay the core members slightly higher wages than the rest. Neighbouring Sapatganj are larger villages with more labouring households and labourers known over the area for their work (for example, the Musahars of the third village). Labourers from these villages have worked in Sapatganj. In this context, even loosely defined work groups can afford labourers

¹¹⁴ It was claimed by some labourers and the Dusadh contractor that there is a third contractor, a Gupta woman as well. However, this was denied by the said woman. During my stay in the village, I did not see her in operation as in the case of the other two contractors. Also, the Dusadh and Dhobi contractors figured most prominently in labour interviews. The dhobi contractor's daughter also worked as a contractor at times (she and her mother operated as one unit).

greater bargaining power and voice. In Baaspur, there relatively more local employers and there is less need of contractors. Here labourers do not show feelings of competition, but then this village has not seen labourers from other villages coming in and ‘poaching’ their work. In rare cases where they have, intra-labour relations have not been strained.

In Baaspur, a Chamar lead labourer or contractor pointed out that an outside employer may contact her husband in a public place like the market at the village junction and he is given the contract, so to say. But the actual organising of labour, work responsibility and wage allocation is done by her. It is her who haggles with the employer or the person he may send the next day (with tractor-trolley) to collect labour, over wages and advance.

In Baaspur, labourers defined a contractor as someone who is middle aged¹¹⁵, has a strong and commanding presence capable of collecting labour, getting the work done and distributing the wages. As put by a Chamar woman whose widowed mother-in-law operated as a contractor: *the mother-in-law used to do wage labour from the beginning, she was clever, shrewd, she was always in the front, could organise labour for work and distribute wages among labourer* (Fieldwork Notes, April 2010). The mother-in-law takes on the work of a contractor because in this way she can also earn some money. She recruits labourers from the neighbourhood, her personal social network, from labouring households in own hamlet mostly.

In Sapatganj, labourers defined a contractor or lead labourer as someone with substantial contacts with village women, one whose mobility for some reason is not as restricted as in the case of others and who is strong and commands authority. According to the Dusadh contractor, a contractor is a strong person with a commanding presence capable not only of organising labour into work groups but also getting the work done and of distributing wages.

This Dusadh contractor actually started at a disadvantaged position but economic needs forced her to take on this role. When she and her husband lost their land in

¹¹⁵ The lead labourers in Baaspur and the two contractors in Sapatganj are middle aged.

floods, they shifted to her paternal village.¹¹⁶ Here the husband became a *sanyasi* (hermit). He died later. She had no brothers to support her and circumstances pushed her into doing wage labour to provide for her young family. She used to work with an old man who was the contractor then. This contractor's death presented an opportunity for her to make better money. Her one advantage was that she is the 'daughter' of the village, unlike other women who were married into the village. Social norms are more stringently applied to daughters-in-law. The Dusadh contractor benefited from comparatively uninhibited mobility, visibility and established contacts. This also gave employers ease of access and freedom to engage in direct contact which is not the case with other female labourers.

In both villages, female labourers claimed that there are no fixed criteria in recruiting labour. Nevertheless, as seen, it is common practise to first call upon relatives, neighbours and own street labourers, friends and people with whom the contractor or lead labourer share close social relations. Primarily (though not exclusively) these people would be of the same caste group, though female labourers argue that caste is not a consideration in team selection (only few respondents outright admitted caste as a selection criteria). However, most of the team members are dalits and where the demand is of few labour it is the relatives and friends who get the first call. In Sapatganj, they are the core team members, the first 'port of call' and as mentioned previously are also paid a higher sum than other team members. Female labourers mentioned that their huts indicate their labour (class) status to outside employers. In both villages, other factors influencing recruitment that came up included: capability, skill, efficiency, who the recruiters get along with, those who are less likely to pick up a fight if wages are low and those more likely to obey the recruiters.

How caste, class and local politics underscore who works for whom is very clear in Sapatganj. Here, the two most landed and important sources of employment are the Rajput and pradhan (Ahir) households. The two are economic rivals. Their political rivalry has to do with gaining political position and power directly or through their proxy candidates to be exploited later for economic benefits and social prominence.

¹¹⁶ Since she and her sister did not have any brothers, they had inherited land from their parents.

Villagers commented on how both households, in order to create their spheres of influence, tried to incite villagers to register false complaints against one another. Both households have their own lobbies among the villagers based on caste, locality and debt. There are several Ahir households that, because they belong to the *pradhan*'s caste and live near him, are under direct pressure and control. This is the case even for those outside debt-based labour relations who still cannot take up employment outside the *pradhan*'s sphere of influence. This is true of several other Ahir households living in other parts of the village. But these households try to seek a balance rather than distinctly aligning with either side. Men from these households may not do wage labour for the Rajput family, but instead send their wives and children (uncommon). In this way, female labour plays an important role in maintaining male patron-client relations.

In Sapatganj and Baaspur, labour interviews reveal debt based recruitment is found in the case of male labourers working at brick kilns. They take advance of up to four thousand rupees from kiln managers or owners in the off-season. On the one hand, this credit is crucial to labour reproduction in the lean season and on the other hand, the credit secures *chimneywallas* (brick kiln owners or managers) labour for brick kiln season. The advance is adjusted against labour wages in the season. In Sapatganj, a male labour contractor, advanced money for travel expenses to those he recruited for migrant work. This was adjusted against their wages later. This contractor's wife was a source of credit in the village for small amounts. In case of large amounts, she could mediate between labourers and prospective creditors (fall outs between her husband and migrant workers from the village also led to 'tension' between her and the concerned migrant worker's wife).

In Sapatganj, debt 'tied' female labourers to creditor households. This is best exemplified with reference to the Rajput family and a Dusadh household located just behind their house. This Dusadh household's history of borrowing from the Rajput family can be traced back to the previous generation. Over the years, they borrowed to meet wedding expenses, to purchase food and fertilizer, for roof repairs etc. Recently, the present male head of the household had, with the help of the eldest son of the Rajput family, taken a loan from a bank. Though taken on the pretext of livestock rearing, it was used to repay a previous debt which had been incurred against part of

their land. The entire loan amount was not sufficient for this and some additional money was borrowed from the Rajput family. The Dusadh family pays interest on this amount.

Both, the male head of the Dusadh household and his wife, provide priority labour to this household and the rate paid is less than the market wage rate. Wage payments are much delayed. In instances when the wife had worked as an agricultural wage labour with a bigger group in Rajput's fields, she was paid less, if at all, or paid much later than the others. She cannot work elsewhere without checking with the creditor family first. She is expected to finish their work first. She is also expected to check with the wife of the male head of the Rajput household, if she can go and work elsewhere and if there is no work to be done for them. She cannot work for households in conflict with this household. Tied labour relations have debilitating consequences for labourers, given the extremely limited work opportunities for female labour. The Dusadh couple also provided unpaid labour services to the Rajput family. The husband has to tend to the livestock and sweep the front courtyard everyday. His wife may also do this (eventually she was 'hired' for this) in addition to doing scooping or drying the grain within the household.

Nonetheless, for this Dusadh household, the 'patronage' of the Rajput household is crucial: the Rajput family serves as a mediator and a safety net in times of crises and otherwise as well. For example, a Rajput family member may plough their field. In Sapatganj, there are other households indebted to the Rajput family, but members of these households are not as attached to the Rajput family as this Dusadh household. Physical proximity of the latter to the Rajput household is a major factor in reinforcing the tied and unfree labour relations. The Dusadh family has often considered shifting to their field but this has been actively discouraged by the Rajput family who pacify the Dusadh family with various promises. This aside the fact remains that the Dusadh family itself does not have the resources that such relocation would entail.

5.2.2.3. *Unfree Labour Relations*

So far in this chapter, we have seen that scarcity of employment, access to fields, credit for various purposes, access to public resources, mediation with local government structures etc underscore labourers' dependency on *badkas*. We also saw that these are the bases of unfree labour relations: debt based, priority, unpaid or tied labour arrangements enforced by a combination of caste, class and political factors. Such labour relations permeate village life in Sapatganj and Baaspur and are even willingly submitted to or upheld. This section does not contribute anything new to the theme of unfree labour relations. It cites few examples explaining the shift from traditional labour bondage to unfree labour relations; how labour rationalises unfree labour relations and very briefly, again looks into the role of patron-client relations.

In neither of the two villages, old style labour bondage—based on feudal exploitation, backed by physical violence, a generalised terror of *badkas* and reinforcement with discriminatory caste ideology—existed. Traditional labour bondage has been replaced with 'free' labour relations characterised unfreedom to varying extents. There is certainly no more physical violence. However, the discourse of superiority-inferiority styled on the basis of caste and class divisions is still deeply engrained in villagers. Spread of education and administrative changes are associated with the decline of bonded labour. Examples of land of bonded labourers being appropriated by their employers also serve as a caution. Monetisation of the economy has necessarily meant that labourers need to earn a cash wage and cannot work in exchange for food only. There is now greater yield from own cultivation and the opening up of the rural economy has meant that men can migrate out to earn and support the family.

In Sapatganj, an Ahir woman explained that many years ago her in-laws did unpaid agricultural labour for a Bhumihar. In exchange, the Bhumihar gave them a plot (about three to four *kathas*) for own cultivation. However, when the Bhumihar's sons grew up, they took back the land and now they themselves cultivate it. According to her, now there was no benefit for labourers in doing such work. Another Dusadh female labourer from Sapatganj, accounted for the shift from bonded labour to unfree labour in the following way: *The Rajput household of the village used to have a bandhak. He was from another village. This naukhar (servant) had to do all the work*

and he would be beaten up if he did not do it. The present era is different from earlier, there is fear of police in all. Rice and wheat are produced in every household, poverty has decreased from before.....(Fieldwork Notes, November 2009).

According to a woman from a labouring Dhobi household (Sapatganj) whose male ancestor was a bonded labourer of the Rajput family, *now people refuse to work without wages. Making cowdung cakes and washing dirty utensils in houses of others is a matter of humiliation, impropriety and is disapproved by the society.*¹¹⁷ *Earlier labour could not say no to their employers and would get very less wages... Now labourers can state that they will go to work only if they are paid and paid a certain wage. But her (the respondent) household is in a different position. Her father-in-law was a bonded labourer of badka babu's (the eldest son of the Rajput family) grandfather. It is a matter of social ties and association.*¹¹⁸ *When she is called upon by them for work, she does not negotiate or answer back and does whatever is asked of her. In the past, badka babu has helped her in times of need. For her daughter's delivery, he took them to a hospital in Faazilnagar block in his car and did not ask for any money.....(Fieldwork Notes, December 2009).*

In Baaspur, a Chamar woman narrated the example of her husband who worked for ten years for a *babu* in a neighbouring block, several decades ago. For tending their livestock, he was given food and about ten kilos of grain every six months. He lived in their house and would come home once a week or so. If he asked for wages, he would be threatened with physical violence, so out of fear he continued working for them. But later he ran away. The employing family reported it at a police station and accused him of stealing cash and jewellery. He was taken by the police for interrogation and his family had to pay some money to secure his release. After that, he never went back.

A Dhobi couple, from Baaspur, explained: *There are no 'bandhaks' (bonded labourers) in the village. Instances of these could be found three to four decades ago, but not now. Now people are clever and no one will submit to such a relationship or*

¹¹⁷ To quote her, '*dusre ke ghar mein gohar pothne mein, chauka bartan karne mein shikayat hogi, laaj aat.*'

¹¹⁸ '*Unka vyavhar hai.*'

work only for food. Taking advantage of a personalised and dependent relationship, badkas (who owned bandhaks) appropriated the land of their bandhak's.¹¹⁹ This is why badkas own so much land today. There is begari however. They (respondents) did begari in the pradhan's household, but since the pradhan claimed a part of the Gram Sabha land as his own, there is 'tension' between them....Earlier, they tended to his livestock, made cow dung cakes, swept the areas outside their house, scooped rice and wheat etc. Now they do not even go to his place on weddings and such occasions. Many others do begari because of fear..... Earlier people would be scared and hide in their huts on seeing the police. The administration was different then. But now as people gain education, they become intelligent. They are not scared of the police now and tell whatever they know (Fieldwork Notes, May 2010).

In Sapatganj, a non-indebted Dusadh female labourer attributed her non-involvement in unpaid labour within *badka* households, to her being a daughter-in-law of the village. This held even in relations with the Bhumihar from whom her family had leased in land. This is not really the case. There are other daughters-in-law of the village who are involved in unpaid labour for *badkas*. However, these are also women who are 'pure' wage labourers and are not young. The same respondent asserted that nonetheless, if the Rajput family was to call her for work, she would abandon any other wage work she may be doing at the time, and do the Rajput family's work first. According to her, *badka babu lets her cut grass from his fields for fodder and take livestock to his fields for grazing. Her kids defecate in his fields and play there. It is beneficial to work for badka babu whose field neighbours her house in comparison to working for the pradhan whose field is at some distance, so not of much use or benefit* (Fieldwork Notes, December 2009). A female Dhobi labourer, from Baaspur, said that *she would first work for a badka (pointing towards the pradhan's house) employer because she lives near his house, his fields surround the village and she has to go through them for any thing. Money is not the most important criteria. A chutka employer can be patient, but badka is easily annoyed and angered* (Fieldwork Notes, May 2010).

¹¹⁹ 'Bandhako ko khilaate-khilaate kitno ka khet apne naam kar liya.'

Unfree labour relations often appear as a part of patron-client relations. As indicated in this chapter, patron-client relations operate as mechanisms through which public and private resources are accessed and distributed. The *badkas* are more aware of government schemes, possess the crucial networking with bank officials, help with the paper-work, act as guarantor etc.¹²⁰ Through acts of 'patronage', *badkas* cultivate vote and labour lobbies. Other than debt, patronage can be of other types, often of everyday variety, which are nonetheless very important. These are not credit based, but function to oblige labour and cement patron-client relations. For instance, allowing a migrant member from a labouring household to call on the patron's phone to speak with their family, providing their vehicle free of cost to transport people to hospital in emergency cases, in rare cases ploughing their labourers fields, allowing villagers to charge their cell phones (especially during elections), providing a needy family with milk/curd/tea etc.

In Sapatganj, fieldwork showed that these informal networks also operated as 'conduits of information'. For instance, an elderly Ahir woman who lived near the Rajput family visited the wife (*Amma*) of male head of this family almost everyday in the evening. She was served tea. Her interactions with *Amma*, pertained to everyday issues of village life. Almost everyday, in mornings and evenings, the male head of the household would be joined by few other local males (from own and neighbouring villages and all mostly upper-caste) in the front courtyard, where they would hold a *panchayat* over tea. However, in this case, the networking is patterned along the lines of a socio-economic 'lobby' rather than a patron-client relation between capital and labour.

¹²⁰ However, it should be noted that in informal sources of credit, primarily *badkas*, are preferred. Credit is a means of survival primarily, mostly directed towards meeting living expenses, school fees, marriages, agricultural investment etc. Formal sources like banks are not approached because of lack of any asset which can be offered as collateral. Given the lack of a secure source of income, there is a real possibility of defaulting on monthly instalments leading to an accrual of interest and a real threat of losing the only possible form of collateral i.e. land. In informal borrowing, land may or may not be mortgaged since collateral is not necessary for access to credit. Where it has been mortgaged the debtor is not charged interest. Instead he loses the right to cultivate the land till such time that the debt is repaid. So there is a possibility of temporary dispossession rather than one losing land to bank permanently. Also, unlike in banks, there is a notion of the debt being transferred on to the next generation so there is at least a far fetched possibility that ultimately the land will revert back to the indebted family. There is no limit on the repayment period and no pressure for monthly instalments where the existence is already hand-to-mouth. In most cases, overhead costs (which includes bribe and misappropriation of relief money given by government under various schemes) and the hassle of paper-work are avoided through informal borrowing.

It should be noted that unfree labour relations do not preclude the possibility of labour struggles. This is dealt with in the section on labour struggles. Prior to that theme, the related theme of labour control has been discussed.

5.2.2.4. *Mechanisms of Labour Control*

At a broad level, debt, locality and otherwise attached labour relations are a means of control over classes of labour. These have previously been discussed.

Methods of labour control exercised vary according to the nature of work. In daily waged work, the employer or someone from his family is present to supervise the labourers. This acts as a check on the labour which otherwise attempts to draw out the work for an extra day.

As put by the Sapatganj Dusadh female contractor: *in cases of daily wage work, labour works slowly and tries to draw out work. Labourers work leisurely, chat amongst themselves about working slowly so that they can come tomorrow to finish the work* (Fieldwork Notes, December 2009).¹²¹ The landowner tries to cajole the labourers into working efficiently and finishing the work on the same day. He constantly monitors the labourers because otherwise labourers chat and not work properly. In his presence, she scolds labourers that either they work properly or leave.

According to a female dhobi labourer from Baasapur, *when a badka employer is not present at the field for supervision, labourers work slowly and take rests. They try to draw out the work. But if the employer is present, then foot dragging is not possible. If labourers are working properly but still the employer keeps hollering at them, they deliberately continue weeding at the same spot and laugh it off saying that labour is in any case infamous* (Fieldwork Notes, April 2010).

According to a Chamar female lead labourer from Baasapur, *badkas pay lesser wages than chutka and this is why their work is not done properly. Local employers are present on field for supervision in daily wage work. They keep egging on labour to*

¹²¹ 'Jana dheere-dheere karte hain, baatein karat hain, kahte hain ki dheere-dheere karo, bihane aayi kaam kare.'

hurry. If a labourer even tried standing up, the employer shouts at him to not stand and keep working. If the employers are not present on site, then labourers work slowly and procrastinate. In contrast, when labourers are working outside the village, they are given water, sweets and are paid in the evening. No one stays at the field hollering at labour. Here labourers work properly (Fieldwork Notes, April 2010). This also reflects how labourers attitude towards employers differ. This was the case in Sapatganj as well.

In cases of contractual work undertaken in own or different villages, the contract acts as a sort of in-built control as labour attempts to finish a task as soon as possible and move on the next one in an attempt to maximise the profit. In contract work, the onus of labour control is on the contractor. If it is done within the village, the employer may come to the field few times to check on labour. The employer may pay the contractor ten-twenty rupees more to ensure that labourers do not run away or take too many breaks and that the work finishes on time and is done properly.

In Sapatganj, labourers mentioned that the contractor worked along side her team. She keeps inciting them to work faster and threatens of wage cut if work is shoddy and not finished on time. However, labourers also claimed that the contractor leaves for long periods of time on some pretext and hardly puts in any actual work. If the work is completed before time, the contractor pockets the extra money. Well aware of this, even in contract work labour tries to prolong work and haggles with the contractor (and this after some of the work has been done because then the employer cannot afford to simply turn them down without trying for a compromise) who in turn bargains with the employer that work would take time and therefore the initial amount should be increased. According to the Dusadh contractor, at times when the employer has not agreed to such additional payment or he paid less than what was agreed upon she has had to pay from own pocket.

Where the employer is from the labourers village and particularly if he is an upper caste class, payments are almost always delayed. Delayed wage payment and/or withholding a part of the due wages is also a common form of labour control directed at ensuring continued availability of labour, greater labour efficiency and productivity.

5.2.2.5. Intra-labour Relations

In both villages, everyday female intra-labour relations are fraught with altercations on varied and even trivial issues.

As put by a Sapatganj Ahir labourer, *in today's world, there is no mutual understanding and harmony.*¹²² *If one wears good clothes and eats well, then others get jealous. This is true not only in case of Chamars and Bhumihars, but case of the village, the whole region and the world.* According to Sapatganj's Dhobi female contractor, *there is no consensus and unity among the Dhobi caste or even among the poor. People think that if they do not benefit then others should also not benefit.*¹²³ *There are fights and tension between households on petty issues and if people get angry on small issues then how will there be consensus?*¹²⁴ *Sometimes people live in harmony and agreement and sometimes they fight* (Fieldwork Notes, December 2010). Similar feelings were expressed by Baaspur labourers. Ansari women stressed that people are concerned with their own success and they do not like to see others do well.¹²⁵

Intra-labour relations are beset with everyday clashes. A Dusadh labourer from Sapatganj elaborated, *there is a lot of fighting among labouring households, among her caste people, over issues like animals straying in others' fields and causing some damage, between their children when parents are at work, within families over some member not working or doing domestic chores, if the field boundary is crossed by mistake during ploughing. In this people are known to have even filed complaints with the police and so on. It is difficult for labourers to be united. Some would work for some badkas even if they were told not to because they would be threatened by badkas that their livestock would be harmed if it entered their fields, some labour would agree to work for lower wages etc* (Fieldwork Notes, November 2009).

¹²² 'aajkal ke zamane mein kaun sahamati?'

¹²³ 'Hamara bhala nahi hoga, to tumhara bhala bhi nahi hoga.'

¹²⁴ 'Chotti-chotti baat par tension, ladai, muh phula lete hain, to kha se sahanmati hogi?'

¹²⁵ To quote one Ansari woman, 'voh apne ghar ka, hum apne ghar ka, sab bigadne pe hi tule rahte hain.'

Such sentiments are widely shared amongst women labourers from both villages. Not only are labourers divided by caste, neighbourhood and personal networks, these are also played upon and possibly manipulated by the dominant classes as pointed out elsewhere in this chapter. Feelings of jealousy, animosity and competition are common among labourers and more so outside economic relations. According to a woman Dhobi labourer from Baaspur,....*even though labour or lower-castes are numerically dominant, they do not present a unified stand on common problems relating to ration or job cards. People do what they think is correct. It is common for people to lie and embroil others in some petty dispute, in showing off their importance. The pradhan or members of his house do not mix extensively with the villagers socially, nonetheless, they are fed all types of information by villagers who have their own agendas. They are served tea when they go to his house. This is how the pradhan comes to know of everything. As the pradhan's fields borders those of many villagers, there is always the fear of repercussions such as the pradhan cutting off their access to his fields for grazing livestock, for defecation or create other problems for labour in accessing their own fields* (Fieldwork Notes, May 2010).

Altercations on issues of slacking and foot-dragging are common in case of piece-rate work like sowing. According to a female Dusadh labourer (Sapatganj), *clashes among members are common on petty issues of who has sown more than others, another member not working fast enough or just sitting out.* She adds that 'netagiri' (petty politics) *is common among labourers....* Recalling a fight between her husband and another Dusadh male member (of the petty producer household which could not be accessed), she says that the *latter lodged complaints at two police stations and paid twenty thousand rupees each to bring in her husband and beat him up. However, though the police took the money, they did not take any action and said that it was a false case. It is common in villages for people to create trouble for others, on incitement from other people* (Fieldwork Notes, November 2009).¹²⁶

It is claimed by employers and accepted by labourers that where they are paid less or late, they deliberately do shoddy and incomplete work. As one female Dusadh labourer from Sapatganj stated, *if there is too much grass to be weeded then they will*

¹²⁶ 'Gaon mein yeh netagiri hoti hain ki kisi ke kehne pe koi bhi kisi ko fasa deta hain paise ke liye.'

*not pull it out, but just press it down with their feet and hurry back to their houses when its time.*¹²⁷ *It is more common for labour to resort to these tactics in other villages. There they simply take the money and run back to the refuge of their homes. But in own village, where will one run to? Employers from own village may even report them to the panchayat* (Fieldwork Notes, December 2010).

Wages are another most common ground for tensions among labour while factors like kinship, caste and locality also cut across. In contract work, on the surface it is claimed that all are paid equal wages but this is not the case in practise. As pointed out elsewhere, the female Dusadh contractor (Sapatganj) accepted that in reality, the main party members (relatives, same caste, neighbours) are paid more and this is justifiable because they work more than the others. These are also people who are contacted first if the work to be done is of small-scale and requires only few labourers.

According to labourers not only are the contractors paid a little extra for '*chai-paani*.'¹²⁸ Some labourers suggested that this is because contractors put in more hard work than others in organizing labour, taking them for work and ensuring that it gets done well and on time.

However, on top of this, contractors or lead labourers also cheat labour. This is so in both the villages. For example, at the beginning of the work the contractor bargains with the employer that labourers will not work for less than twenty rupees per day. It may be that the employer agrees to this rate but the contractor only tells the labourers that the employer has said that he will think it over. At the end of work, the employer gives money on the basis of twenty rupees per day per labourer to the contractor to distribute. But the contractor distributes wages on the basis of fifteen rupees only and tells the labourers that this is what she was given by the employer. There is some heated verbal exchange and the contractor takes the moral stand that if the labourers don't trust her they should ask the employer themselves. Labourers may then go to the

¹²⁷ '*...theek se nahi nuchenge, laat se daba denge, nauchenge nahi, kaam chod kar ghar bhaag jaayenge time par.*'

¹²⁸ This literally refers to some tea and snacks but what is implied by this is that this little extra given as advance to the contractor is to get her on the good side of the employer so that she keeps a tight control on labour, that the work is done well and finished on time.

employer to confirm but are actually helpless because the work has already been done so they might as well take the money offered. Contract work is generally undertaken outside own village and as such it is rare that female labourers would actually confront the employer and various taboos restrict female mobility and interaction with outsiders.

As pointed out by the Sapatganj Dusadh female contractor, *labourers fight and then cool down. Labourers' enter into heated verbal exchanges but do not lodge formal reports against each other. They fight and then unite. In the village, people need each other* (Fieldwork Notes, December 2009). Labourers are aware that an open confrontation would be debilitating in the long term as these contractors are an important source of work. Labour may rebel by joining the party of another group. However, in view of economic vulnerability and food insecurity, they may go back to working for the same contractor and employer. The Sapatganj Dhobi female contractor agreed with the Dusadh contractor that *labour gets angry with her when she does not recruit them. She tries to rationalise with them that she can recruit only as many as are required by the job. If she were to take them all, then would they not have to return empty-handed? If one contractor bags more jobs than others or does not consult the others at times, the latter are jealous and get angry with that contractor* (Fieldwork Notes, November 2009).

Regarding wages, there are two further sources of strained relations between labourers in both villages. That there is always a section of labour willing to work for low wages when another section of labour may be insisting on increased wages is a cause of friction and fragmentation among female labour. Delayed wage payment is another cause of intra-labour tensions, particularly where there is a contractor or 'point-woman' involved. It has happened that if the employer has not paid till after few days of work completion or has paid less than what was said, the labourers have confronted the contractor. A heated verbal exchange follows, abuses are traded and the contractor is forced to pay from her pocket or in turn confront the employer.

Exchange labour relations (referred to as *adla badli* or *janvahi*) is another area of conflict (or cooperation) among women belonging to the classes of labour. Exchange relations are organised along the lines of caste-class, neighbourhood and social

relations. Exchange relations exist only in female tasks of sowing, weeding or *katni* and takes place among dalits owning some land with available family labour. It is often the case that fights break out over whose work should be done first, one not turning up in return, sending children instead of capable and efficient adults or procrastinating. In retaliation, if the labourer on the receiving end is asked to recruit labour in future, she will not recruit that labourer.

In Sapatganj, local dalit labour against outside dalit labour adds another dimension to intra-labour relations. Different terms and conditions of work and difference in the treatment meted out to them lead to fractious relations between them and foreclose any grounds of cooperation. Local employers resort to calling labour from neighbouring villages when the local labour insists on a wage hike. They are more likely to be given the work on contract basis and even if given on daily wages, it will be higher than the local rate and they will be offered food and old clothes. In Sapatganj, there have been instances when the Rajput family has hired Mosahar labour from a neighbouring village. Mosahars are known in the region for their hard labour, activism and are generally able to command and get a better wage rate and contract based work. Sapatganj labour acknowledged that it is generally with them that the season's wage rates open. Nonetheless, when Mosahars come to Sapatganj, confrontational exchanges between the two are common.¹²⁹

Lack of a common ground among regional labour is an important factor why local labour cannot afford a consistent confrontational stand against the local *badkas*. Cheap labour is always accessible from neighbouring areas in the case of female labour as it does not migrate. Terms and conditions of work are always more favourable to incoming labour who would face similar problems in their village. Working outside their village is a very good source of income and therefore the possibility of outside labourers ever aligning with local labourers is very low. As such, a non-confrontational approach is the only recourse to local labour to wrest benefits from local *badkas* without losing out on 'privileges' associated with such patronage.

¹²⁹ Though this is denied by the Mosahars.

According to a male member of the Sapatganj Rajput family, a big drawback of local labourers is that they are unorganised. Because labourers are satisfied with their material conditions, they will never progress, be mired in petty issues and want instant results. As was put by him:

Villagers want instant results. They do not work hard. He once tried to organise villagers on the issue of MGNREGA, particularly women. But women would ask him if they would also have to go to work on roads and if they worked for so many days, would they get this much money? Lack of organisation is the most negative point. There are four to five self-help organisations in the village, but these are again completely ineffective. People have taken loans from banks to start SHGs, but mostly they have appropriated the funds. Benefits have not percolated to the public. Loans are given for livestock rearing also, but there is no willingness to take initiative (Fieldwork Notes, November 2009).

Even if SHGs or some other source extended loans to people, it is doubtful if it would be used for intended purposes. For instance, in Indira Awaas Yojna, beneficiaries get twenty-five thousand rupees. Out of this, seven to eight thousand would be the pradhan's share. Then the beneficiary would probably buy a goat or some animal. In the leftover money, the beneficiary will buy some bricks for house construction. In this village, few have got Indira Awaas Yojna. Obviously it has not been utilised for house construction as can be observed from the huts. People say that 'hum to aise rahe hi rahe hai, humko kya? Jisko rahna hoga woh banvaye ga' i.e. people think that they are anyway living like this, so why should they bother? Those desirous can build concrete houses. Officials have ideas about what can be done, but they do not want to make an effort. He himself wants to start a SHG of women that teaches them stitching and embroidery (Fieldwork Notes, November 2009).

Despite the above issues, intra-labour relations are an important social and support network. In times of personal crises or against a common enemy (*badkas*) female labourers show solidarity, albeit a temporary one. One instance is that of labour coming together for wage negotiations. In another case, the young son of a Dusadh (Sapatganj) was seriously injured by a pig and villagers collected *chanda* i.e. donations to help the family meet medical expenses. Where a labouring household is

unable to meet expenses such as those related to wedding, their relatives and friends help out in any small way they can, for example, putting them in touch with possible sources of credit or even borrowing on their behalf. Successful organisation of these occasions in a manner befitting their status and fulfilling the societal expectations is a matter of the community's respect. Similarly another example is where several women get together to hold religious functions.

Given that female labourers are unorganised, fragmented and that generalised relations of dominance and subjugation are a common aspect of socio-economic village life, it should be the case that labourers are absolutely powerless and resigned to a life of servitude. But this is not the case. The following section explains why this is so.

5.3. Political Expression and Labour Struggles

Female labourers from the dalit classes of labour category have, on occasions, challenged their oppressors and exploiters, the *badkas*. This is evident in their understanding of general village politics and their struggles to influence their position as labourers. This section will first look at how female labourers relate to local politics, before moving on to labour struggles.

Caste is the most popular form of identification. A *pradhan* is identified by his caste and not party affiliation or policies. Political support is more often than not expressed along caste lines. In both villages, dalits, without any exception, spoke out in favour of Mayawati. In Baaspur, a male Dhobi labourer, explained voting as a caste-class exercise: harijans vote for the elephant (BSP), Muslims vote for the cycle (SP), Brahmins and Rajputs vote for either lotus or palm (BJP or Congress respectively). He attributed the phenomenon of caste based voting to the decline of the grand old umbrella party of Congress and post Indira Gandhi phase when identity politics came to dominate the Indian political stage.

However, as was the case in labour relations (and wider social relations), caste as a medium of identification also encompasses a class consciousness. In the field villages, the upper caste-classes are the dominant political powers: they either occupy positions

of authority such as that of pradhan or they are the actual power behind proxy figures. Female labourers believe that even if one of their own caste, was to be in a position of power and authority, it would bring no relief to them because this person would act under the influence of upper caste-class. The caste-class overlap is evident in how labourers refer to themselves. Labourers see that it is them, the dalits, who are agricultural labourers, who live in huts, who are poor and who are not pradhans. A common refrain among women is that no one is for the poor and that once in power, these positions are used to further self-interest and benefit their '*khaas aadmi*' (favourites, loyalists).¹³⁰

Women in general do not participate in panchayat meetings (though some admitted to eavesdropping) and male labourers also go only when called upon specifically. Lack of confidence and knowledge underline female labour's exclusion from or low participation in formal political institutions and operations. Many expressed problems in articulating and expressing themselves in an acceptable manner. Presence of women in a predominantly male congregation where issues seen as coming under purview of the male domain/family head are discussed is a transgression of established roles and the boundaries of which women also don't question. However, in the absence of the male head of the household, it is acceptable for the woman to attend the panchayat, but only if the matter to be taken up that day directly involves that household and only if she has been asked to attend the day's proceedings. Also, these meetings more often than not turn volatile, with abuses and accusations liberally thrown around and as such classes of labour generally tend to avoid them.

There was only one example, of a woman being a mainstream participant in the panchayat proceedings. This was the Dusadh female labour contractor from Sapatganj. Her involvement was 'natural' as she represented the SC woman quota in the panchayat. She explained her role as follows: *she attends all panchayat meetings. Though she does not benefit from being a panchayat member because the pradhan does not pay her anything, her purpose in attending these meetings is to support the pradhan. Discussions over budget take place there, various decisions are made like should a gate be build here or a house, to act as a witness along with four or five*

¹³⁰ '*Garib ka kauno saath nahi deb, aur khud ko kaha se kaha bana liya.*'

other people etc. She puts her thumb impression on paper and sometimes her son signs for her. She was chosen as a member because she can articulate and speak up, she can answer back and does not hide. She does not get any money from the pradhan. She does this job because the pradhan is from own village and she feels that she should support and help him whenever he needs it because so would he in times of need (Fieldwork Notes, December 2009).

Female labourers understanding and critique of politics is based not on any systematic study of party policies or ideology, but is expressed in pragmatic and practical terms, drawing on their every day experiences. Women are not familiar with the BSP, but they recognize its leader, Mayawati, from various posters and propaganda in the villages. Their understanding of the government machinery is restricted to the village, block and *zilla* or district. Beyond this, they do not distinguish between the levels of government. Schemes like mid-day school meals, scholarships to dalit students and MGNREGA are attributed to Mayawati's government. In Baaspur, an Ansari woman pointed out that at election time, a man from another block comes to the village for propaganda purposes. He is from Mayawati's party and is paid hundred rupees per day. The pradhan is supplied with alcohol for distribution among his main people as a way of vote lobbying. The lack of MGNREGA's benefits actually reaching them is attributed to corrupt middlemen like their pradhan. A common refrain among labourers is '*sarkar mein kami nahi, beech ke aadmi, pradhan ki kami*' i.e. the problem is not with the government but with middlemen like pradhan.

The overlapping caste and class consciousness is reinforced from what labourers observe in village level political proceedings. In Baaspur, a Chamar was the pradhan in the recent past. The villagers mocked him for his inability to discharge office functions and duties without the prior knowledge and consent of village *badkas*. This *chutka* pradhan had promised allocation of *abaadi* land, but after a behind the doors discussion with the *badkas* of the village and several middle level officials, a primary school came up on the proposed land. Several female labourers, from both villages, astutely remarked that even Mayawati is forced by political compulsions and

calculations of running a government to accommodate the *badka* combine.¹³¹ Female labour comes across as very well-informed of the political themes of the moment, for instance, on the statues installed by Mayawati in Lucknow or the speculations surrounding the relationship between Mayawati and the BSP founder Kanshi Ram. Many female labourers criticised Mayawati for inflation and increasing the procurement price of sugarcane. Benefits of the latter accrue to the *badkas* who cultivate sugarcane substantially. This increase will consequently raise the price of sugar.

One of the biggest achievements of Mayawati's rule for *chutkas* cum labourers, according to women, has been the direct and easy access to police in recent years. Female labourers pointed out that their reports are duly noted and immediate action taken. They don't know the details of the SC/ST Act¹³² (referred to as Harijan locally), but are aware of its potential or practical implications. This extends to them a feeling of security, a protective measure deployed against upper-caste atrocities and abuse. A female dhobi labourer (Baaspur) explained that *the politics of badkas centre on keeping the chutkas subjected. They do not like the chutkas to get food, clothes, be educated or get better employment, so that chutkas do the work of badkas. The chutkas live in fear of badkas because their children may cut sugarcane from badkas fields or their livestock may wander in their fields. The Mayawati government has put badkas on the backfoot. If they say anything, they can be blamed under the SC/ST Atrocities Act* (Fieldwork Notes, May 2010).

An Ansari woman emphasised that Mayawati's government had not benefited her community. She gave the following example....*the Mayawati government has benefited the harijans a lot. At one time, from the Chamar hamlet, two car loads of people went to Deoria where they stayed in a hotel free of cost, they were given blankets and saris. Both, men and women had gone. Dhobis and Kamkars also do not fear the badkas and they even abuse badkas just as the latter abuse them* (Fieldwork Notes, April 2010). There are two assertions implicit here. One is that only dalits have

¹³¹ At different times, the BSP has formed governments in alliance with the BJP, a party traditionally associated with an upper caste base. Mayawati has also made deliberate attempts to woo other castes. Though still drawing on the populism attached with a dalit identity, her political strategy is marked by a shift from *bahujan* (majority i.e. dalits) to *sarvjan* (everyone).

¹³² A GOI initiative to prevent caste based atrocities.

benefited under Mayawati and not other castes. This sentiment was reverberated by *badkas* as well. The second is manifest in terms of the differences between different caste (or religion) labourers. This will become clear in the next chapter, but suffice it to say here that only certain sections of labourers have managed to access corridors of power in their successful struggles for resources and benefits. Antagonisms and jealousy between these labourers and the rest of the labourers are common and prevent intra and supra- village labour solidarity.

Overall, the structural position of labourers remains unchanged. They share a deep sense of being poor, isolated and alone, of being unworthy and inferior which has been internalised and only symbolically shunned. For instance, girls did not like to be photographed while cutting grass, tending to livestock and particularly when touching cowdung. So they would cover their faces with scarves. Educated young men, when asked if they took animals for grazing, expressed offence. Dalits clearly identified themselves as *harijans* and not with their specific caste and insisted on their names being appropriately prefixed with '*shri*' (Mr.) or '*shrimati*' (Mrs.). But the labourers are aware of the ground reality and their prospects for improvement. Respondents often remarked that without land or education, they are unlikely to make any progress.¹³³ As put by a Koeiri male labourer, *if a labourer earns fifty rupees a day, then would he buy food or send his children to school? What will we do if not wage labour, how will we survive?*¹³⁴

Labourers hesitate to assert any demand for fear of being denied. The fact that they are lower-castes is itself something to be ashamed of. In addition, a refusal is seen as an insult to their self-respect and an embarrassment. There is also an apprehension that *badkas* may do something untoward. Labourers do not like to ask employers for wages repeatedly. A Kharwar woman from Baaspur cited apprehension of what the *badka* may say on being asked for wages, as a reason for not asking wages. This was widely agreed upon amongst female labourers.¹³⁵ A female Dhobi labourer, also from

¹³³ '*Garib aadmi kauno aadmi hai, din bhar kaam kari, kin kar lai, to shaam ka khai* (Fieldwork Notes, May 2010).'

¹³⁴ '*Majdoori nahi karenge to karenge kya, jiyenge kaise* (Fieldwork Notes, May 2010).'

¹³⁵ '*Maangne mein sharm, laaj lage ki badka kuch kha na de. Hum chutka hai to yeh sharm ka baat hain nahi* (Fieldwork Notes, April 2010)?'

Baaspur, retorted that Bhumihars should think that labourers have worked hard and should be paid. But he does not give of his own will, then to ask is to demean one self.¹³⁶

Another reason for the lack of labour action is overlapping socio-economic ties of dependency, as explained elsewhere in the chapter. In Baaspur, two Ansari women, stressed that the number of labourers does not make any difference. The whole area is under the influence and fear of the *pradhan*. If labourers' ancestors were afraid of *badkas*, then why should they not be afraid now? It would have been a different story if from the beginning only labourers had not adopted a submissive attitude.¹³⁷ A generalised fear of *badkas* is a major limitation. A woman's sense of self-respect, modesty and a certain expected way of behaving are also cited as limitations on labour action. In Baaspur, a female labourer said that when the *pradhan* campaigned for votes, he touched everyone's feet, but now one would not even spit on his hand. When her husband approached the *pradhan* for a job card, he was refused as he had not voted for the *pradhan*. But 'ladies have respect' (*'ladies ki izzat hoti hai'*). Another said that they (labourers) are genial and loving individuals, but can also be opportunistic and serving when need be.¹³⁸

However, as was flagged in the discussion on unfree labour relations, it is not that there are no labour struggles or that labourers have not successfully acted to improve their position.

It was mentioned earlier that unfree labour relations do not preclude the possibility of defiance and insolence on the part of labour towards their oppressors. Below, I cite examples from Sapatganj and Baaspur to support this.

¹³⁶ 'Karya karke chali aaye, paisa maangne mein sharm aai. Voh bhumihar ko nahi sochak chahi ki itni mehnat se kaam karat to paisa nahi dek chahi?...voh apne man se nahi kahange ya denge aur maangne mein aithi laage (Fieldwork Notes, April 2010).'

¹³⁷ Yeh sara elaka *pradhan* ka hai. Do hai to kya? Jab baap, dada dare, to beta nahi darega?....Shuru se seena taan ke rahte to alag baat thi (Fieldwork Notes, April 2010).

⁹⁷ 'Hum prem bhaav ke hain, ka puchi? Jarorrat padi to siyaar bani (Fieldwork Notes, May 2010)'

In Sapatganj, a Dhobi female labour narrated: *Today also Badka Babu has a bandhak. An old man (over sixty years old) works for him...He earns about five hundred rupees a month. He is also given his meals by them. When he goes home, he is given some token amount or even grains...., the old man had once got very angry that he was not given flour or new shoes and he left work and went home for about six months. Then badka babu's younger brother went to his place to placate and cajole him into coming back to work. He was given new shoes and was asked to have his meals at their house* (Fieldwork Notes, November 20009). A Dusadh female labourer stated that *if she has fought with an employer, she does not work for him as long as she is angry. But since she lives in the village, she is helpless and obligated to work for them (gaon mein rahi to laachar hoi to jaayeke padi)* (Fieldwork Notes, November 20009).

In Baaspur, few Ansari families exemplify how stable and successful migration can decrease dependency of female members of these households on wage labour. In these cases, everyday humiliating experiences of being inferior may be limited, but a wider sense of duress and threat exists. But these do not preclude the possibility of defiance on the part of labour. This is usually expressed in subtle forms like withdrawal from such work or procrastination. One Ansari woman, living in close proximity of the pradhan's house, and whose husband migrated to Saudi about six years ago explained the situation as follows:

He (husband) is involved in various types of casual work including construction, painting, flooring etc. Presently he owns a small tailoring shop which he operates at night and during the day he works in a cloth store. He is able to send home between ten thousand and fifteen thousand rupees once every two to three months.....Till about two years ago, she undertook agricultural wage labour... for the Pradhan only. He is the major employer in the village and owns so much land that labour from other villages come to work on his fields..... The other bhumihars live in other parts of the village and hire labour from there.....the pradhan thinks that they (the respondent and her family) have so much money, but do not think of the expenses involved. If she goes to his house to ask for few chillies, she is told to purchase it from the market.....So now she purchases everything from the market, even if it has to be on credit (Fieldwork Notes, April 2010).

Previously, she did unpaid labour within the pradhan's house, but not any longer. Because of her caste (read religion), she did not undertake work such as washing utensils or cooking.....She was called for tasks like scooping. On religious functions like Ramnavmi, she would be asked to make a mud stove and on these rare occasions, she is allowed to touch few utensils.... 'Pradhan tang karte hain' i.e. the pradhan harasses. He controls everything. The pradhan's fields border hers.....and he does not allow the latter to take her goats there for grazing. A dirt road led to these fields but this has been taken over by the pradhan who cultivates sugarcane on it. The pradhan is known to have threatened them with cutting off their access to their fields. She asserts that one cannot be silent (passive) all the time. She now takes her goats alongside the road for grazing where neither chutkas nor badkas can complain, though those whose field borders the road may do so. She says that she hesitates and even feels shy to sit alongside them because they are badkas. If she is called upon for some work by the pradhan's house, she does not outright decline but forwards excuses such as her keeping unwell. They have to 'respect' the pradhan because they have to cross his fields to reach theirs (Fieldwork Notes, April 2010).

This story indicates that extra-economic coercion and a fear of the consequences of threats and sanctions are a major root cause that perpetuates dependency on petty capitalists, even in situation of relative economic prosperity. Even outside of immediate labour relations, their movement and actions are not free but designed to evade badkas domination rather than challenging it. This also limits their bargaining scope in terms of wage relations vis-à-vis local badkas. So, for Ansaris, it has been more a case of co-existence fraught with occasional petty conflicts and exchange of taunts.

The scope of bargaining and resistance is greater in the case of households not located in close proximity of dominant *badkas*. This was seen earlier in the case of Sapatganj Rajput family and the Dusadh family. In Baaspur, labouring households from other hamlets who are not dependent on the pradhan for access to their fields, reflect greater autonomy and agency in staking their rights in all domains. This does not mean open hostility or confrontation, rather a constant attempt to have their say and win some leeway on issues such as wages. The crucial difference is that unlike in the above case

there is no constant and real threat to the very means of their livelihood and subsistence. There are a greater number of wage labourers in other hamlets. They also undertake wage labour in surrounding villages which means that they are not solely dependent on availability of local opportunities. When they get called upon for domestic labour (like scooping, tending to the livestock, sweeping etc) by the *badkas*, they get some grain or fifteen to twenty rupees for a day's work, unlike in the above case where it is not remunerated.

Forms of labour resistance are largely modelled as 'weapons of the weak' (see chapter 2, pg. 43). Scattered and isolated incidents/actions expressing resistance do not challenge notions of deference or the system but nevertheless give labour some limited leverage which they use to wrest important concessions. Through persistent negotiations, demands and haggling, female labour is able to win certain concessions in terms of work. This has been dealt with elsewhere in this chapter.

One specific example is from Sapatganj. The Kharwar woman who washed dishes in the Rajput household did not come to work for several weeks, despite a member of the family personally calling on her at her house. This was her way of resistance or expressing discontent with low and delayed wages, treatment meted out to her i.e. not been given clothes, tea, being served dinner late or given leftovers. Some villagers speculated that it was because her son was back in the village and he did not like his mother working in their house. There could be some truth in this.

Generally, the power to refuse work if the wage offered is much below the going rate or if wage hike demands are not agreed to, is also a type of resistance. Whether or not labour takes this route depends upon their specific economic position at that point of time. Doing shoddy work, abandoning work in the middle, not turning up for work until the employers has asked them twice or thrice, are other examples. In the absence of *badkas*, they are very assertive, vociferously critical and even abusive and threatening. But in reality and actual practice this is very rare. Nonetheless, *chutkas*'s see the power to raise their heads, look in the eye and speak up to *badkas*, to negotiate and argue with them are seen as important tools of their assertion and improvement in their position.

A Dusadh labourer (Sapatganj) attributed these changes to Mayawati's *raj* and contrasted this 'empowerment' with previous decades when labourers lived in fear of bhumihars. *Labourers would hide in their huts whenever they saw a Bhumihar coming towards them. They could not go up to the doors of Bhumihars houses, could not sit in front of them, labourers would lower their head in shame and listen to Bhumihars. They could not refuse doing work and could even be physically threatened. Even rich chutkas were scared of badka zamindars. Previously, labour did not have any money or possess any sense. Today, even if Mayawati was no longer in power, labour would not revert back to old ways. Even if one does not have any money, one has intellect now. The ability to assert their rights provides an impression of some control and maintains labour's sense of dignity. Labourers now produce enough to eat* (Fieldwork Notes, December 2009).

One way of bypassing the structures of oppression in the village like the *pradhan* is to directly approach the block administration for relief. However, here the role of middlemen is not eliminated. For example, in Baaspur, one respondent had approached the district administration for accessing old age pension, with the help of the previous *pradhan*. This can be attributed to the fact that people like *pradhan* are aware of whom to approach, can access them and they write applications or argue on behalf of villagers etc.

Increased and easier access to the police and immediate and effective police action on their complaints is a powerful tool in the hands of labouring classes. It serves as a deterrent to *badka* brutalities. Labourers have been known to file police complaints (even false ones) or use the threat of doing so to counter *badka* oppression. Though as pointed out elsewhere, the action may be backed by a Bhumihar for personal reasons and it may even be that the labour is coerced into it due to unfree labour relations.

While labourers claim that *badkas* are now scared to get into fights with *chutkas*, this is denied by upper-castes who argue that in reality labour is still scared to approach the police by themselves and labour asks them to mediate. This may or may not be the case depending upon the parties involved and the nature of the case. But for most part it is true that labour feels more secure now. In several case labourers have even filed false reports against others villagers (upper and lower castes). There may be two

reasons behind this: one, petty fights with neighbours and other villagers where reports are filed out of spite and second, dalit labourers may be incited by the *badkas* to file cases against rival *badkas* using the pretext of wrong allocation of BPL cards, refusal to make job cards, not giving the stipulated amount under IAY etc.

A female Ahir labourer from Sapatganj added that now even children do not hesitate in picking up fights with Bhumihars. Labourers are supported by their relatives. Labourers can fight Bhumihars in their homes.¹³⁹ In previous decades labourers lived in terror of bhumihars because they could not provide sufficient food for their households through farming. This labourer and another Ahir labourer elaborated that the yield would be very low in those times. There was no fertilizer other than cowdung, and no irrigation source other than one canal. Now fertilizers are available in the village and there is tube-well irrigation. Now, people can produce much more.

In a village close to Sapatganj, an incident of physical violence against an untouchable had resulted in all low castes uniting against the perpetrator who was a dominant landlord. Both sides verbally abused the other and threatened. Ultimately after few days the landlord had to apologise to the victim under collective pressure and boycott (and actually also under the very real threat of being jailed under the Prevention of SC/ST Atrocities Act). In Sapatganj, could the absence of any such violent and immediate threat be taken as a cause for the absence of collective labour action? When a woman from the village where the above incident had taken place and a female labourer from Sapatganj were asked to explain the difference, I was told that in the former, the Bhumihars are Brahmins while in Sapatganj they are Rajputs who are feared more. According to the woman from the village where the incident had taken place, an important reason for labour's united stand was fear that if a stand was not taken now, in future the violent oppression would only increase.

In Baaspur, one Chamar household traced their family's legal struggle with the pradhan's family, over some land, back to more than two decades. Ultimately the pradhan lost the case in court. However, some time later, on the contested land, the married women of Bhumihar households constructed '*chhatts*' (tiny hut like mud

¹³⁹ '*Ghar mein ghus kar lad lete hain* (Fieldwork Notes, November 2009).'

constructions which are worshipped on a religious function). This has put the dalit household under pressure and they are unable to farm the land. When the male head of the dalit household had argued against it, he was beaten up. Many harijans had even acted as witnesses and provided evidence against the pradhan. However, later, the harijans did not pursue the matter, the statement was changed and the pradhan let off the hook. These *chhatt* structures have religious importance and cannot be destructed. The present male head of the dalit household is also thinking of extending the area under '*chhatt*' because this will bring him blessings. Nonetheless, according to him tensions between the two households will continue for life-time.

Again in Baaspur, a Dhobi female labourer, wrongly accused of cutting crop from the pradhan's field, reported him to the police station under the SC/ST Act. Though nothing happened to the pradhan, this act itself is in stark contrast to previous decades where the very name of police was equated with terror and physical violence and even the sight of men in uniform was enough to send *chutkas* into hiding. But now their reports are lodged and immediate action taken. Respondents attribute this to Mayawati's *raj*. As such, BSP's rise to prominence has contributed to labour's empowerment. The difference is also explained with reference to the greater spread of education among the classes of labour.

A resident of a village neighbouring Baaspur, filed a complaint against the acquisition of *banjar* (barren) land by the present pradhan in his wife's name (this village and Baaspur together constitute one panchayat). According to one respondent, the matter was quietly closed when the pradhan gave the Superintendent District Magistrate some money. In another instance, a team of inspectors had come to Baaspur for a surprise inspection of the MGNREGA work being undertaken. A labourer was asked how much wage was paid and he said eighty rupees. Again the pradhan had to bribe some officials. The respondents take pride in telling such instances and though the culprit evades the law because of his financial and political clout, it does reflect the increasing propensity of labour to challenge the dominance of and discrimination by *badkas*. At the same time, such actions do have repercussions for labouring classes: the labour who had mentioned a lower wage rate (above example) was thereafter not called for work by the Pradhan under the MGNREGA project or in his personal capacity. However, the labourer was not aware that the query had come from an

inspector and therefore, there is the possibility that he would not have given the actual rate if had known so and there have been precedents to this fact as well. On the positive side, the pradhan henceforth started giving the stipulated wage but at the same time continued making money on the side by making false entries in the job cards.

These modes of resistance are shaped and conditioned by the specific socio-cultural and economic positioning of female labourers. Whether or not they lead to desired results, female labour is not a muted subject. But unlike, male labour it cannot afford overt methods of labour struggles or even sit out for longer periods of time as ultimately it has to reconcile given the limited work options it has as compared to male labour. Nonetheless, their importance cannot be discounted. Aware of their dependency on capital, female labourers avoids a confrontational approach and does not seek structural change or equality. Rather, they seek to work around it and win concessions.

Chapter 6

Making the View Wider: Compare and Contrast Dokhgadh to other two villages

This chapter outlines the main social and economic relations in the third village, Dokhgadh, as well as describe the labour relations of female labourers from dalit classes of labour and their struggles. This last field-site will not only to compare and corroborate the evidence in general across the three villages. The chapter organisation is similar to the previous field chapter. Where the findings are similar to the ones in other field villages, these will not be detailed again, but only be briefly indicated here and the reader will be referred to the previous discussion.

6.1. A Socio-Economic Profile of the Villages

Here Dokhgadh's spatial organization, socio-religious configuration, landownership structure and occupational patterns are laid out.

6.1.1. Socio-Religious Composition and the Spatial Pattern

Comprising just over a thousand households, Dokhgadh, is located in a different administrative block. Spread over a vast area, it is the second largest village of the block and has its own gram panchayat.

Dokhgadh is similar to Sapatganj and Baaspur on several accounts. Villagers identify their caste as *jati*, an important determinant of social relations, interpersonal behaviour and a medium of political association. The government system of caste classification is overshadowed by the local *badka-chutka* terminology and the use of the term harijan for dalits. Caste and class correlate to a great extent, but this is not to say that there are no poor upper castes or rich dalits i.e. the caste-class overlap is not absolute. But these exceptions do not figure in villagers' everyday lives where the *badkas* are upper-caste, most landed and economically and politically powerful. Table 6.1. presents the caste profile of Dokhgadh.

Table 6.1. Dokh gadh: Caste Details of All Households (Figures indicate the number of households)

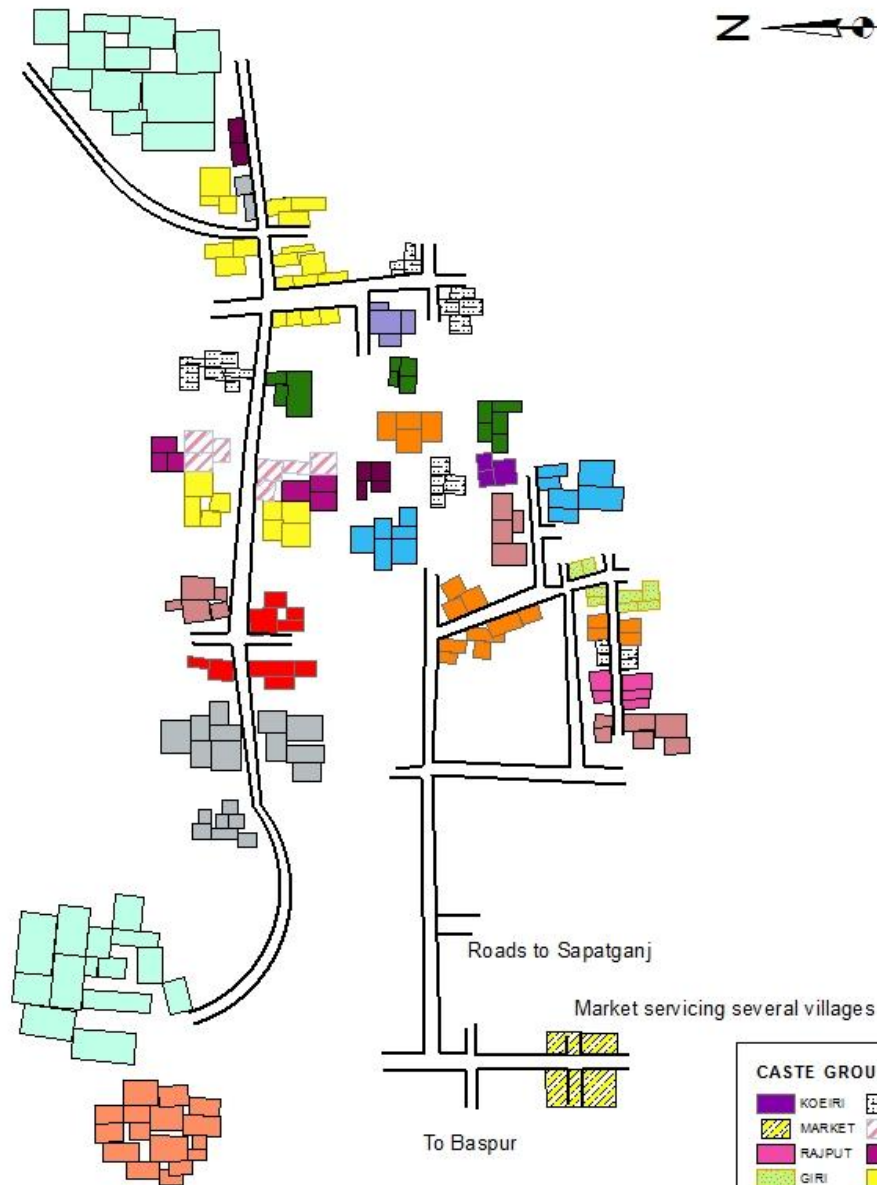
<i>Jati</i>	General	OBC	SC
Bhumihar	9		
Brahmin	86		
Rajput	12		
Baniya	84		
Jhummar ¹⁴⁰	3		
Pasuram	1		
Sheikh (Muslim)	6		
Siddiqui (Muslim)	11		
Mian (Muslim)	1		
Bareilly (Muslim)	1		
Devang (Muslim)	9		
Teli		8	
Giri		19	
Koeiri (Khushwaha)		30	
Chauhan		66	
Pal		17	
Ahir		136	
Sunar		5	
Prajapati (Kumhar)		7	
Gosain		17	
Lohar		13	
Mansoori (Muslim)		12	
Badhai (Muslim)		5	
Ansari (Muslim)		100	
Faqir (Muslim)		1	
Gond			66

¹⁴⁰ The castes of Jhummar, Pasuram, Bareilly and Devang are not well known in the region. Since they are not listed in the Central OBC list or in the State SC List, they are put under the General category here. Otherwise, not much is known about the local understandings of their caste status.

Chamar			51
Khatik			72
Dom			2
Dhobi			20
Dusadh (Paswan)			4
Mosahar			137
Total number of households-1011	223	436	352

Overall, Hindus are preponderant. The OBCs are the largest group. OBC among the Hindus include: Teli, Ahir, Giri, Koeiri, Sunar, Prajapati, Gosain, Lohar, Chauhan and Pal castes. Among the Muslim castes, Mansooris, Ansaris, Badhai and one Faqir household are included. Ahirs, Chauhans and Ansaris are the most numerous castes in the OBC group. In Dokhghadh, 'degrees of untouchability' were not evident. In local perception, all scheduled castes were equally unclean. Nonetheless, there was consensus that the Mosahars are the worst off among the dalits because of their landlessness, they are generally denigrated for their abusive and brash behaviour, very poor living conditions and undertaking the most stigmatised work i.e. brick kiln work. At the same time, Mosahars are begrudged for their success in accessing public resources and schemes. All dalit groups are Hindu: Gonds, Chamars, Khatiks, Doms, Dhobis, Dusadhs and Mosahars. Within these, Mosahars, Khatiks, Gonds and Chamars make for more than half the dalit households in Dokhghadh. Upper castes are numerically the smallest group, as was the case in Sapatganj and Baasapur. Hindus are predominant in this group and include Bhumihars, Brahmins, Rajputs and Baniyas. Sheikhs, Siddiquis and one Mian household constitute the Muslim upper caste groups.

DOKHGADH



Not to Scale

CASTE GROUPS AND AREA

KOEIRI	BRAHMIN
MARKET	SHEIKH
RAJPUT	DEVANG
GIRI	ANSARI
CHAMAR	GOND
BANIYA	DHOBI
DALITS	CHAUHAN
KHATIK	DUSADH
AHIR	MOSAHAR

The organisation of space in Dokhghadh has been displayed in the map on previous page. The organisation is caste based. The twelve hamlets and their main resident castes are stated in table 6.2.

Table 6.2. Dokhghadh: Hamlets and their Caste Structure

Hamlet Number	Main Resident Caste/s
1	Giri
2	Koeiri
3	Brahmin, Baniya, Khatik, Chamar
4	Ahir
5	Brahmin
6	Ansari, Chauhan, Khatik
7	Mosahar
8	Brahmin, Ahir
9	Ansari, Devang, Sheikh
10	Dhobi, Gond
11	Chauhan, Gond
12	Mosahar

Dokhghadh does not have contiguous boundaries. As in Sapatganj and Baaspur, caste, religion and class aspects (building, assets, social conduct of women, landownership) are evident at the hamlet level and existing socio-economic relations do not coincide with the census village. In the first hamlet, the few Rajput, Brahmin and Baniya households are located in one side; the Giris in the centre of the hamlet and at the other tip (at some distance from the Giris) are the Gonds. The second hamlet is dominated by Koeiris and Ahirs to a lesser extent. The only other castes are Chamar and Gonds. The dalits live at two ends of the hamlet, separated from the main part of the hamlet where Koeiris and Ahirs reside.

The third hamlet is centrally located, multi-caste in nature and the largest hamlet. It is the hub of political and economic power as the *pradhan* and several prominent *badkas*

reside here. The panchayat *bhawan* (building) is in this hamlet. Brahmins and Baniyas live in the centre of the hamlet, but are separately clustered. Among the Brahmins, the *pradhan* and the next most powerful household are situated next (though not closely because they are built on big plots and surrounded by empty expanse of land) to each other, away from the other Brahmin households. The OBCs—Koeiri, Sunar, Ahir, Prajapati, Mansoori, Ansari and Faqir households—are spattered towards the end of where Baniyas live. Dalit households include those of Chamars, Khatiks, Doms, Dhobis, Gonds and Dusadhs. Most of these are situated on the outskirts of the village and each caste households are arranged together. The one Pasuram caste household is also located in this hamlet.

The fourth hamlet is the second largest hamlet. The Ahirs, who are the better-off in the hamlet, live along the two main streets. Gosains live together. Dalits i.e. Khatiks and Gonds are settled at the end of the hamlet. The next hamlet comprises only Brahmins. Class differences are not evident. In the sixth hamlet, households are located on both sides of a major road. The few upper caste households—Brahmins and Baniyas—are located together. Irrespective of caste, Muslim households are clustered together. The dalit households—Gonds, Pals and Khatiks—are situated apart from the main hamlet on the way to the next hamlet. The one Bareilly household is also located in this hamlet. The seventh hamlet is located very far from other Dokhghadh hamlets. It is a very small hamlet, comprising only Mosahars. In class terms, they are a homogenous group. These households were originally a part of the last hamlet of Dokhghadh. But given the high population density in a very small area, some of these were resettled on *abaadi* land (the new hamlet) years ago. In the next three hamlets, it is the case that upper castes are clustered apart from the other castes. The Muslims, irrespective of caste, are settled very close to each other. The dalits are all located apart from the other caste households, usually along a different street at the outskirts. Irrespective of caste, class or religion, the class differences are not stark in these hamlets.

The next hamlet is important in the sense, that outside of the third hamlet, it has the largest employers of agricultural wage labour. One of the families is the most landed in the three villages and my impression is that, this is the case for the region. The class aspect is also significant to the caste based spatial organisation in the hamlet.

The upper castes i.e. the Bhumihars, Brahmins and Guptas lived at the centre of the hamlet, each caste grouped together. The Chauhans (OBC) and the dalit households, comprising Gond and Dhobi households were located at the end of the hamlet, at some distance from the centre. The last hamlet is a sizeable one. With the exception of two Dusadh households, all others are Mosahars. The Dusadhs are better off and located right at the tip of the hamlet, but not distant from the Mosahar households. Economic differentiation within Mosahars is insignificant. The hamlet also has a small panchayat *bhawan*.¹⁴¹

6.1.2. Land Relations

As in Sapatganj and Baaspur, villagers take land to be not only an indicator of economic worth, but also a source of pride. The social base of landownership in Dokhgaadh is presented in table 6.3. It is representative of the ground situation rather than formal title ownership. Various arrangements regarding distribution and cultivation of land and the sharing of yield exist. However, there are some households to which neither of the above case applies, but nonetheless, receive some share of the yield from the parent house.¹⁴² This is observed where the male head of the new household is a migrant worker, completely involved in local non-agricultural wage employment or self-employment. His young wife is required to adhere to socio-cultural practices restricting her mobility and wage labour participation. But since, both the parent and the new household come across as independent socio-economic units in all other respects, their landholding status is accordingly tabulated. Households which do not cultivate jointly or independently and do not receive any part of the yield are classified as landless (see pp.128-129).

¹⁴¹ This was built after the death of a Mosahar from starvation which had led to a political furore.

¹⁴² At the most, these households seldom participate in own cultivation.

Table 6.3. Dokh gadh: Caste-wise Distribution of Landholdings of All Households (all figures are in ha)¹⁴³

Caste (Total no. of Households)	Landless (Less than 0.01)	Marginal (0.01- 1.00)	Small (1.01- 2.00)	Semi- Medium (2.00- 4.00)	Medium (4.00- 10.00)	Large (More than 10.00)
Upper Castes						
Brahmin (83)	5	16	28	17	14	3
Bhumihar (9)	0	0	5	1	0	3
Rajput (12)	1	0	2	3	6	0
Baniya (80)	16	40	12	8	4	0
Pasuram (1)	0	1	0	0	0	0
Jhummar (3)	0	3	0	0	0	0
Mian (1)	0	0	1	0	0	0
Siddiqui (11)	3	6	1	1	0	0
Sheikh (6)	0	0	0	0	6	0
Bareilly (1)	0	0	0	1	0	0
Devang (9)	5	4	0	0	0	0
OBCs						
Teli (8)	0	5	2	1	0	0
Pal (16)	4	8	3	0	1	0
Ansari (97)	11	52	29	5	0	0
Koeiri (28)	2	18	5	3	0	0
Sunar (5)	3	0	2	0	0	0
Chauhan (60)	12	42	6	0	0	0
Lohar (13)	2	7	0	3	1	0
Badhai (5)	0	2	3	0	0	0

¹⁴³ Overall, details of forty six households (less than five percent of the total households), from various caste groups are unknown. This is because of several reasons. For example, male members of the household were unavailable or are migrant workers and the women respondents were very young and involved in domestic chores only. Land and other details are not shared with them and neither do they ask. Few households refused to provide land or any other information. In these cases, some basic information about the caste and occupations of the household members could be gathered from neighbours but not land details other than knowing whether they are landless or not. The figure in parenthesis indicates the number of households for which data could be collected.

Ahir (128)	15	81	16	5	11	0
Giri (19)	2	7	7	2	1	0
Gosain (17)	1	14	1	0	1	0
Prajapati (7)	0	7	0	0	0	0
Mansoori (10)	3	7	0	0	0	0
Faqir (1)	1	0	0	0	0	0
SCs						
Mosahar (128)	90	34	4	0	0	0
Khatik (70)	23	39	7	1	0	0
Dusadh (1)	0	0	0	1	0	0
Chamar (51)	14	36	1	0	0	0
Gond (65)	15	43	3	3	1	0
Dom (2)	2	0	0	0	0	0
Dhobi (19)	3	15	0	1	0	0
Total (966)	233	487	138	56	46	6

Just above half the landholdings are marginal. Around 14 percent are small. Semi-medium and medium holdings constitute just over ten percent of all landholdings and less than one percent are large holdings. Rest are landless. Like Sapatganj and Baasapur, marginal and small holdings are preponderant. This is also in line with regional trends. But Dokhghadh is different as here landlessness is significant (just under twenty-five percent) and sixty-three percent of the landless households are dalits. Twenty-four percent of the OBC and about thirteen percent upper caste households are landless. All large landholdings and majority of the medium and semi-medium sized holdings are found among upper castes. Some instances of semi-medium and medium holdings can be found among the OBCs as well, but very few in the case of dalits. Marginal and small holdings are predominant among the OBCs and dalits. As such, a strong positive correlation is found between caste status and land base.

As in Sapatganj and Baasapur, a substantial land base is an important determinant of the *badkas* clout because this makes them large employers of agricultural wage labour. This is buttressed by political connections and their superior social status.

The upper castes are *badkas*. In comparison to Sapatganj and Baaspur, politically the most powerful in Dokhgadh are Brahmins and not Rajputs. Political power is concentrated in the hands of two Brahmin families from the third hamlet. They are big but not the largest landowners in the village. One of them is a previous pradhan (two consecutive terms) and the present de facto pradhan. The second is a distant relative. No one from the second household occupies a political position but a male member worked as a contractor for a government authority. The two are economic and political rivals. Villagers spoke out in favour of either of these households, of how they had helped them get job cards, BPL ration cards, extended credit in times of need, sponsored religious functions in the village, provided vehicles for transportation in health emergencies, mediated with other bureaucratic structures and the police and various other acts of patronage. There are other Brahmin and Rajput families who exercise significant economic and political influence, but not of the same stature as the other two households. In either case, the economic and political command of these various households is augmented by the high social status of their caste.

A further related point deals with the issue of how different are the petty capitalists from big capitalists. Based on NSS criteria, there are few large landowners in this village. However, as will be evident from the occupational profiling, these do not show unique features that would distinguish them from petty capitalist producers' economic or social outlook and have been described as such. They could be seen as emergent capitalists, following Bernstein. However, a blanket generalisation is not possible. In a neighbouring block, cash crop cultivation was diverse and more extensive (banana, litchi, turmeric, sugarcane). These big capitalists also exported to regional markets. One of them had even been nationally awarded for their farming methods and crop quality. This dynamism was lacking in field villages.

On the other hand, the *chutkas* are either landless or marginal and small landowners, with mostly no independent access to corridors of power. It appears that even when in position of power, *chutkas* are used as pawns. For example, the present pradhan of Dokhgadh is actually a Chamar. However, all powers associated with the post and privileges and influence thereof are commandeered by the previous Brahmin pradhan referred to above. The latter was identified as the pradhan by the villagers, as he is in

practice. According to some accounts, the Chamar pradhan worked as a labourer for this Brahmin household. He was learning driving (so that he could operate the jeep of the Brahmin as a taxi acquired under a government scheme), when in an accident, he injured another person. The Brahmin bribed the appropriate authorities to ensure that no charges were brought against the Chamar. In the next pradhan election, when the seat was reserved for a SC candidate, the Brahmin filed papers in the name of his Chamar 'servant'. Now, the former operates as the de facto pradhan and the actual Chamar pradhan is employed by him at hundred rupees per day, he signs all papers etc. Villagers scoffed that he sells bananas.

The caste-class overlap will become clearer in the subsequent discussion on occupational patterns. This is mentioned earlier, though the overlap is not perfect.

Leasing is more common in Dokh gadh than Sapatganj and Baas pur. The reasons for leasing in or leasing out land are similar to those mentioned in the previous chapter. There were two other reasons in Dokh gadh, not seen in the other two villages. One is that land consolidation (p.74) has not yet taken place here. Therefore, land fragmentation is high. A common observation made by villagers was the fragmented nature of their holdings and a parcel of their land being located in another village. This makes it difficult for them to travel everyday for cultivation purposes and look after the crop (and more so in the case of family labour involving female members of the house). In many such cases, villagers have leased out that parcel of land to locals from that area and leased in roughly the same area of land in an area nearer to them. The second reason for leasing out land was seen in the few upper caste households not having access to family labour, unable to afford hiring in labour, they did not undertake manual labour and therefore could not rely on exchange labour as well. Overall, upper castes (Brahmins primarily) are the net lessors and the OBCs (Ahirs primarily) are the net lessees of land.

In majority of the lease arrangements, the nature of lease and its terms were similar to those in Sapatganj and Baas pur. In Dokh gadh, it was more common for landowners to lease out land after sugarcane harvest (generally three years or so when the land needs to be prepared for cultivation again before sugarcane can be planted) and reclaim it after one crop is harvested. This is the case, where landowners are not based in the

village for most of the year. A different trend from other two villages is that in cases, lessors make half the investments and decide what is to be cultivated. For example, some landowners ask lessees to grow fruits and vegetables, in addition to other subsistence crops. Fruits and vegetables are taken by the landowners who then sell them in area markets. Like Sapatganj and Baaspur, in Dokhgadh as well, leasing relations may follow socio-economic ties: land may be leased out to a labouring household which does regular wage labour for the landowning household.

Other than through leasing, households have also come into land as creditors. This land is called *rehan*. In these cases, the creditors retain the right to cultivate land till the time the debt is cleared. They can cultivate any crop and the produce is not shared with the owner of mortgaged land i.e. debtor. This is also an oral arrangement and largely found in cases where households have access to cash and family labour but little land. The most common reasons for mortgaging land were health and wedding expenditures. This is true even in the case of upper castes like Rajputs who do not participate in local wage labour given their social status. *Rehan* land relations appeared in Sapatganj and Baaspur also, but on a very small extent. In these two villages also, the terms are the same for *rehan* land relations.

6.1.3. Occupational Structure

In this section, a gender and caste based mapping of work relations in the village is undertaken. Given the large village size, its multi-caste nature and word limitations, only the larger castes will be considered. These are also the most relevant groups. First, the following table shows the involvement of male and/or female labour and their pay in some of the main types of local occupations.

Table 6.4. Dokhgadh: Gendered patterns of labour commodification and Wage Structure

Occupation/Task	Wage (in Rupees)	Gender
Sowing of rice/wheat	(i) 35-40 per <i>bhoja</i>	(i) Female

Weeding	30-35 per day (for about eight hours of work and half of this for work done till afternoon.)	Female
Harvesting (i) Rice/Wheat (manual) (ii) Small tractor operated thresher (process is called 'dauri') (iii) Cutting Sugarcane Leaves (iv) Cutting Sugarcane Stalks	(i) One bundle of rice/wheat for every ten or twelve bundles harvested, threshed and delivered at the employer's house or in rare cases 35 per <i>katha</i> (ii) payment in cash or kind; the tractor/thresher owner retained the chaff as fodder (iii) 30 per day (iv) 50 per day	(i) Female (ii) Male (iii) Female (iv) Male
Ploughing using oxen and a wooden plough (usually owned by the ploughman)	20 per <i>katha</i>	Male
Various types of spade work (digging, mud filling, preparing the field)	100 per day or 30 per <i>katha</i>	Male
Unskilled casual labour (roofing, construction)	100 per day	Male
Skilled labour (roofing, construction)	150-200 per day	Male
Moulding and carrying head loads of bricks	200 approximately per 1000 bricks and towards the end of the season this may go up to 300. It usually takes two to three days to mould thousand bricks, but if other family	Male and Female (as attached unpaid family labour)

	members are involved then it can be done sooner.	
Carpenter	100 per day	Male
Tractor driver	1100 per month, 1500-2500 per month. May be given food and clothes as well	Male
School/college teacher	800 per month; 850-1500 per month; 2000 per month	Male
Watchman	1000 per month	Male
Tending to livestock	100 per day; 1500 per month	Male
Tailor	1000 per month	Male
Shop assistant	100 per day	Male
Security guard	140 per day, 4200 per month	Male
Taxi driver	50-100 per day; 2500-3000 per month	Male
Insurance agent	2000-2500 per month	Male
Sale of milk	15-20 per litre	Male and Female
Fertilizer shop	200-400 on good days and on bad days 0-50	Male, his mother helped out occasionally
Cycle repair shop	50-60 per day	Male
Home based general store (mobile cart)	100-200 per day	Male, senior female members may help out
Peddlers	0-150 per day	Male
Quack doctor	2000 per month	Male
Sale of milk, curd, cream	15-25 per kilo	Male (milk) and Female (milk, curd, cream)
<i>Madrasa</i> ¹⁴⁴ teacher	850 per month	Male

¹⁴⁴ School where Islamic teaching takes place

Head clerk	5000 per month	Male
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The above data shows similar trends as in Sapatganj and Baaspur: the gendered nature of village labour markets, sexual division of labour within agriculture, only male labourers reflect movement out of agriculture, gendered wage gap in agriculture and more generally, higher rates of remuneration for male occupations. It is notable that wage rates in Dokhghadh are slightly higher than in other two villages, in agriculture and few other occupations (tending to livestock, tractor driver). Additionally, it is possible that certain agricultural tasks like harvesting and ploughing may be given on piece-rate basis as contractual work. This was not the case in Sapatganj and Baaspur. Wage rates vary slightly owing to work location, individual labour relations or caste of employers. I will return to this point later in the chapter. Below, I describe the occupational profile of the main non-labouring and labouring castes and relate them to Bernstein's class categories.

Bhumihar: All Bhumihar households are petty producers. Cultivation of sugarcane is combined with food crops. The extent of mechanization is low, in most cases limited to ploughing operations. They do own assets like tractors and tube-wells which may be rented out to villagers. In all cases, agriculture is based on hired labour and male family labour in supervisory capacity. In fact, a labourer present at the time of survey in one house quipped of the Brahmins that these people had never even seen their land. Where men are migrant workers, elder women of the household hire agricultural labour. The only two instances of local non-agricultural employment are those of a man working as a teacher in a private inter-college and a woman employed as a *shiksha mitra*.¹⁴⁵ The only example of public employment is of a man in the army. Male members of three households are involved in casual migrant work as a clothes vendor, an electrician (Dubai), a welder (Saudi, with family) and as casual labourers. Women of these households bear similar domestic responsibilities and subscribe to similar socio-cultural norms as described in the previous chapter, in the case of female members of upper caste petty capitalist households.

¹⁴⁵ *Shiksha Mitra* refers to para teachers i.e. basically teachers hired on a contract basis in government schools.

Labour commodification in this caste category is a reflection of some educational qualifications and a regular job and salary. Given their upper caste status, these households are not involved in degrading local agricultural or unskilled casual wage labour jobs, seen as the preserve of dalit labourers. Caste status is a limiting factor for these landowning households lacking money capital. They resort to migrant work or even mortgage part of their land to meet living expenditures. For example, one household owning a medium sized landholding had mortgaged part of it to meet health expenditures and for '*naukri*', implying that debt incurred against land was 'invested' to obtain public service or regular employment for a male member. In these households, reproduction is ensured through either and/or combining small surplus generating agriculture, non-agricultural employment and remittances.

Brahmins: They are a large group. More than half of these households are petty capitalists, just over one-fourth of them are petty producers and an even smaller number come across as classes of labour. Petty capitalist Brahmins are semi-medium, medium and large landowners. Commercial farming is undertaken on a comparatively large scale. Agriculture is mechanised and substantially draws on hired labour as well (weeding, transplanting paddy, harvesting and threshing on a small scale). Male family labour may be involved in a supervisory capacity. In isolated one or two cases where male members are not available, land may be leased out or elder women or daughters of the household hire labour and give out wages.¹⁴⁶ A source of income is renting out tractors and tube-wells.¹⁴⁷ Part mortgage of land to meet health, wedding and house repair/construction expenditures is not uncommon. Livestock rearing is a small-scale commercial activity.

Self-employment is found only in men. Examples include: home-based taxi service, trust run school, owner-operator of a JCB, manager/principal of own school, flour mill owners and wood contractors.¹⁴⁸ Some of these self-employment activities are

¹⁴⁶ Women go to the nearest hamlet whose labouring households have worked for them over the years. Alternatively, they may call one from their mobile phone and ask him/her to pass on the message to labourers or directly call a labourer from his/her mobile phone.

¹⁴⁷ For example, hiring out a tube well and pipe at approximately hundred rupees per day. Rates for tractor depend upon the cultivating attachments being used and the charge is levied on per *katha* basis (usually varies between twenty to thirty rupees). Types of cultivating attachments observed include ploughs, levellers, and disc harrows. These are also owned by the tractor owning families and the hire charge includes the charge for these as well. Tractor owning households usually employ a driver also.

¹⁴⁸ JCB is heavy earth moving machinery.

indicative of a strong asset base and employment of other workers. Few also showed connections with and access to public officials and resources. For example, the brother of the JCB owner worked as a contractor for the Public Works Department (this is one of the two most powerful Brahmin families). Another (the de facto *pradhan*) has a jeep (under a government disability scheme) which is operated as a taxi by the driver employed (according to some villagers, he employs three drivers who ply the van as taxi). Men work as teachers. There was one example of a journalist. A woman was employed as a nursery teacher. These forms of labour commodification show a non-agrarian base, most exemplify regular employment, educational skills and better remuneration. High social status is attached to most of these self-employment activities and forms of labour commodification.

Migrant work is uncommon. Very few households extended details about migrant work, destination and remittances. One was a Reader and his family was based with him. Two others were based in Oman with their families. One man did steel business, one worked in a medicine shop and two others worked for a private security company. It was noticed that where migrant work involved casual labour at the lower ends of the urban informal economy, family members in the village tended to evade saying so. The shame associated with admitting a Brahmin doing such labour was evident in a Brahmin woman whose husband is a migrant worker in Dubai who told me that she did not ask her husband for details. She (and by extension, her husband) feels embarrassed and humiliated as he has not studied much.

Types of male public employment included an *upper zilla krishi adhikari* (district agricultural officer), a constable at the local police station, one in CRPF, two in the army and one as a compounder in the government hospital nearby. A woman worked as an *anganwadi* worker. Like women from upper caste petty capitalist households, interpersonal relations of Brahmin women and their domestic role, show similar characteristics.

Petty producer Brahmins are mostly semi-medium and medium landowners. Sugarcane is cultivated as cash crop, though on a much smaller scale than the petty capitalist Brahmins. Mechanisation is low. Agriculture is organised on a mix of family and hired labour. In family labour, both men and women (to a much lesser

extent and generally middle aged or elder women) are engaged in supervision and/or manual labour. Female labour is particularly hired in paddy transplantation and where weeding is extensively required. Livestock rearing is a commercial activity. A significant proportion of these households have mortgaged substantive land area in the absence of any other running income sources. Health and wedding expenditures, low or infected yields, high labour costs and lack of alternate regular income sources and family labour are common reasons for mortgaging land. A home based male tractor mechanic was the only example of non-agricultural self-employment. A petrol pump attendant and teacher, both men, were the only examples of local labour commodification. As salaried government employees, one man was in the army and the other employed in a district development office.

Few young men were engaged in migrant work such as welding, casual labour, shop assistant, dye master and as casual workers in a hotel and steel factory. In only one instance was migration family based. To a limited extent, migration also reflects a failure to turn education into productive employment. I was told by a Brahmin man that his son had an M.A. degree but could not find any respectable and productive employment and consequently took to migration. Migrant work appears as an alternate to degrading local wage labour. A woman lamented that she was given such a caste by God that she cannot do *banihari* (wage labour) for others. She was embarrassed doing own agriculture but it had to be done and there was no other option. If a needy person comes to her for old clothes, she gives her own clothes so that the 'izzat' (honour and respect) of a Brahmin is not violated. When another woman was asked about wage labour, she felt insulted and asserted that a Tewari (Brahmin) will ask for '*bhiksha*' (food, grain etc. obtained by asking for alms, charity) but not do *banihari*. Women of these households followed the usual socio-cultural sanctions but not as rigidly as in the case of Brahmin petty capitalists.

The few Brahmin households which at best can be understood as classes of labour either are landless or their entire landholding has been mortgaged since many years. Where land had not been mortgaged, both men and women were involved in own cultivation and rarely hired labour. Livestock rearing is undertaken as a commercial activity. In the one case of self-employment observed, a widow had recently opened a small general store at her home. The only case of local labour commodification is a

female agricultural wage labourer. Her marginal landholding is mortgaged, her husband is mad and she has six children to support. Migrant work, undertaken by young men, is an important source of income for these households. Examples included: skilled construction labour (and in the village when at home), dyeing work, private security, brick kiln work and casual labour.

When queried as to how they support themselves in the absence of agricultural or other income, one woman said they do '*Brahmin ka dhanda*' (the work of Brahmins) i.e. they perform marriages and other religious functions or perhaps, as previously indicated, they are involved in '*bhiksha*'. These can be perceived as non-income generating activities that contribute to household reproduction. As classes of labour, these Brahmins may be materially as worse off as dalit classes of labour, but they are not treated with contempt or subjected to exploitation or oppression which is typical of agricultural wage labour. They project an attitude of helplessness and pity. Socio-cultural restrictions on mobility and interaction were not observed to any significant extent in elderly or middle aged women (as were the women owning a store and one undertaking wage labour) but the young married women were involved in domestic chores only. But even they did not practice seclusion to any noticeable extent.

Rajputs: Like Brahmins, Rajputs show economic differentiation. Just under half of them are petty capitalists, half are petty producers and one belongs to the classes of labour category. The petty capitalists are the bigger landowners among Rajputs. Commercial and subsistence agriculture are combined. Ploughing functions are mechanised. With the exception of two households wherein family labour (male and elder female members) may undertake manual labour in own cultivation, agriculture is dependent on hired labour and male family labour in supervisory capacity. Livestock rearing is a commercial activity. Male members of two households are migrant workers. Migration is family based. In one household, one male member worked in a sugar mill during season and another as a computer manager. In the other household, the male member is involved in electrical work. Three were government employees; one in Central Public Works Department, one worked with the Delhi electricity department and the third was a *Krishi Adhikari* (agricultural development officer). Migrant work comes across as dignified and salaried and based on skill and

educational qualification. Women's economic responsibilities and social conduct is typical reflection of upper caste petty capitalist women.

Petty producer Rajputs are small and medium landowners, a fact most of them were embarrassed to tell me. Sugarcane is cultivated as a cash crop on different scales. Ploughing functions are mechanised. Agriculture is based on family (primarily male and in few cases, elder female members) and hired labour. The component of hired labour is less. Livestock rearing is a commercial activity. There are no instances of local labour commodification or migrant work. Two men were regular government employees: one is in coal service and the other in New Delhi Municipal Council. In these two cases, migration was family based. Women from these households were engaged in domestic chores and observed socio-cultural restrictions as well.

The only Rajput labouring household is landless. It is involved in livestock rearing for commercial purposes. The male household head is a migrant worker and at the time of the survey, was engaged in cloth weaving in Bombay. His young wife is responsible for domestic and care and reproductive economy.

Baniyas: Majority of Baniyas portray petty producer characteristics and some are classes of labour. Depending upon landholding size, petty producer Baniyas combine subsistence and commercial agriculture on different scales. Mechanisation is low. Agriculture is mainly organised on family (manual and supervision only) and hired labour. Women are involved in agriculture to a much lesser extent than men and particularly young married women, unless there are no elder female or male members in the house. The extent of hired labour depends upon individual economic circumstances, availability of family labour or as claimed in some cases, it is just that they (Baniyas) do not do such work. A tiny number drew on exchange labour as well from among neighbours or extended family members. Some of them own tractors, bullock-carts, diesel pump-sets and pipes which are rented out to villagers for primarily agrarian purposes. Livestock rearing is an important source of income. Tractor owners may themselves plough fields of others for a price and bullock-cart owners, owning a plough as well, may operate as ploughmen.

Banias are traditionally traders and they show strong continuity on this front. Male members of more than half the petty producer Baniya households are into self-employment as petty traders and in several cases, a household is into more than one self-employment activity. Some are vegetable vendors in various local markets.¹⁴⁹ They operate from alongside roads, as peddlers from their cycles or in few cases, from own land located near a market or few rent a tiny room nearby to store vegetables. Many own small mobile general stores that stock tobacco products, hot food, other snacks etc. These may be located either outside their homes, elsewhere in the village or in prominent market junctions. In the latter cases, these are mostly located on rented ground. Where they are home or village based, (elder) female labour may help out. In one case, the store doubled as a flour mill. There was another instance of a rice mill, located on own land.

Several others are peddlers selling wool, cosmetics, wrapping paper, clothes and ice cream. One's cycle was even equipped with a stove on which he made *jalebi* (a sweet). One operated a fertilizer shop in a nearby market. The fertilizer was bought on the black market and then sold to villagers. This man's mother helped him out in the shop. Several ran fixed shops located in various markets, selling cloth, rope and other roofing material and sand and cement. A quack doctor worked out of one such shop in addition to travelling around villages.¹⁵⁰ One bought and sold medicines from home. There were only two instances of female self-employment. Both these women owned sewing machines and worked as tailors out of their home.

The income from these sources widely fluctuates, but they are nonetheless crucial for daily household reproduction. These are also in keeping with the social status of the Baniya caste and indicate a non-agricultural base, ownership of productive assets, and some minimal resource base. For example, the earnings from the fertilizer shop ranged from two hundred to four hundred rupees on a good day and on bad days fifty rupees or even nothing. Income would increase during season. But the female head of this household stressed that they did not do *banihari*. Her husband is mad and when her sons were young, she had mortgaged a part of her land to support the family rather

¹⁴⁹ Vegetables are bought from the local *mandi* i.e. the main market where vegetables are likely to be sold on whole-sale rates.

¹⁵⁰ These shops were mostly located on rented land. Depending upon size and location, rents varied between fifty to five hundred rupees per month. In one case it was one thousand rupees per month.

than taking to wage labour. According to another, there is no '*laaj*' (shame, humiliation) in doing own business but there is '*laaj*' in working in another's field.

Villagers attribute the low and volatile earnings from these self-employment activities to a small consumer base, depressed rates and the poverty of the consumer. These factors are likely to have a differential impact on fixed shops in major market locations and cycle vendors. Shops in prime locations have attendant benefits like broad customer base, higher prices, timely payment etc. Compare this to a scarcely stocked home or village based shop. It appears that caste is an important factor even where businesses are home based. Though there were only two instances of female self-employment, it is possible that women are more affected by the above factors (see below, the case of female self-employment in labouring Baniyas).

Members of only five households were involved in local labour commodification. Men and women from these households did agricultural wage labour. Usually elder female members did wage labour and young married women undertook wage labour only in the absence of other family members capable of supporting the household or precarious economic circumstances. Male members from three of these households also did non-agricultural casual labour. Migration is not a very important phenomenon. Young men were involved in migrant work as welders, clothes/vegetable vendors, casual labourers, as a watchman, a casual worker in a hotel, potter, petrol pump attendant, crane driver, and carpenter, in sari work and in a ply factory. In some cases, migration is stable in terms of income and destination and remittances are relatively high. Women of these households are engaged in domestic economy and do not observe the restrictive socio-cultural traditions to any significant extent.

More than half the Baniya classes of labour households are landless. Agriculture is mostly a subsistence activity and mechanisation is low. It is organised on the basis of family and exchange labour. Both men and women (excluding young married women) are involved in it. Two of these households mentioned hiring in labour as well. Livestock rearing for commercial purposes exists to a very small extent. Men from a little over half of these households are into self-employment activities. Operating from alongside roads in various local markets or as peddlers, they sell vegetables,

fruits, utensils or sweets. One runs a general store, one a small mobile cycle repair shop and one other sells eggs, all located in a market. One has a tea stall in the market. The wife of the man helps out in the stall and their young son sells eggs at the stall.

The only instance of female self-employment is a woman owning a stitching machine and tailoring clothes. However, this is not symbolic of any challenge to repressive traditions or economic empowerment. Her young age and married status limit her mobility. Her mother-in-law gets orders and delivers finished products. Her clients are the villagers who themselves are unable to pay the going market rate. On top of it, they are often unable to pay the full amount at the time of delivery. Those who can pay more prefer going to established shops in major market areas. Often, it is the case that caste, kin, social relations dominate the economic relation and the woman has to accept whatever amount she is paid.

Nonetheless, these self-employed workers do own a minimum of productive assets like cycles and stitching machine.

Local labour commodification is not common. Agricultural wage labour is undertaken by men and women. In the latter case it is limited in extent, found only in the case of middle aged and older women and dependent on other factors. For example, one woman had been deserted by her husband. She is the sole earner of the household. But she does wage labour only within the hamlet because of '*sharm*'. She also provides unpaid labour activities like scooping to *badkas* of the hamlet. Another said that she did wage labour when '*garj pade, jab garib tab jaayenge hi*' (Fieldwork Notes, July 2010), i.e. when economic needs demand it because when one is poor, one has to do wage labour. Her husband works in a brick kiln and when she was asked if she also worked there, the husband immediately shot back that '*aurat kis liye jaayegi chimney par, hum kis liye hai?*' i.e. why will the woman go to the chimney? What am I for? This is an indication of how strongly is the breadwinner notion attached to the man and the movement and interaction of women controlled to reflect the household's honour and socio-economic status. Men were also engaged in casual labour, brick kiln work and one works as a roofer. Out of three brick kiln workers, one took advance

from the kiln in the off-season. An *Asha Kiran* worker was the only example of non-agricultural female labour commodification.¹⁵¹

Young men are involved in migrant work. They work as peddlers selling clothes, as vegetable vendors, one did embroidery, one worked as a weaver and several others as casual labourers. Women from Baniya classes of labour households did not observe seclusion. They are more mobile and visible as wage labourers.

Ahir: one Ahir household is petty capitalist, a little less than half of the remaining Ahir households are petty producers and the rest are classes of labour. A ten hectare landholding family, the petty capitalist Ahir household's agriculture comprises substantial sugarcane cultivation and is completely based on hired labour. The male head of the household may be involved in a supervisory capacity. He retired as an officer from the Indian Airforce and then went on to work in the Bihar Excise Department. His eldest son is a Judge and the son's wife is a doctor. The middle son recently became a sub-inspector of police. It is difficult to comment on the socialisation and mobility of female members of this household. I interacted with only the male head of the household, though it was noticed that unlike in other houses, the female members were not visible outside the house or it could be that they were not in the village at that time (as is usually the case). In any case these women would not be involved in any wage labour or even in own agriculture in any capacity. Unlike the upper caste petty capitalists, this household showed no linking of economic and political power in the village.

A small number of petty producer Ahirs are semi-medium and medium landholders. Most of them are marginal holders. Boundaries between these and Ahir classes of labour are fuzzy and they do not show much difference in terms of how agriculture is organised or wage labour participation. A couple of the larger landowners had mortgaged parts of their land and therefore, their operating land area was much smaller. Depending upon owned landholding size (as sugarcane cultivation on leased land is rare), petty producer Ahir households combine subsistence agriculture with

¹⁵¹ A GOI initiative, it trains women to disseminate advice on hospital deliveries, birth control and other related health information. The respondent denied any remuneration, though the programme stipulates a pittance amount on a case by case basis.

sugarcane cultivation. Agriculture is mostly based on family (men and women) labour. In comparison to upper caste petty producers, more young married Ahir women are involved in own cultivation. Exchange labour is also common and takes place among fellow caste people and neighbours. They seldom hire in labour, except in peak season time. Exchange labour is less significant and the component of hired labour more in the case of medium and semi-medium landowners.

Livestock rearing for commercial purposes is common. In Ahirs, the sale of curd and milk is a more important source of income than in other castes. This is also their traditional occupation. Several of them owned one or two bullocks and a cart and/or plough. Where the plough is provided by the employers, wage rates are less (ten instead of fifteen rupees per *katha*). Those owning ploughs work as ploughmen and those with carts use it to transport sugarcane, people, material and/or carry brick loads at kilns. Non-agricultural self-employment is rare. One man owned a medical shop in a major local market and another owned a grocery cum general store in the same market. One is a veterinarian at the block. Just over half the households have one or more male and female members (to a much lesser extent) undertaking local wage labour. With the exception of two *anganwadi* workers, women are only into agricultural wage labour. Apart from agricultural wage labour, men work as casual labourers, they mould or carry head loads of bricks at kilns and even take advance in off-season, work as skilled construction labourers and as a watchman.

As one moves down the petty producer hierarchy, it is noticed that despite economic distress, several Ahir women do not undertake wage labour at all or do it only within their hamlet. This is because of *sharm* and *laaj*. One said that she did wage labour in other villages only. These feelings can possibly be attributed to either one of the following reasons: that in terms of caste status, they are not worst off; that as *gvalas* (milkmen), agricultural wage labour is not their main occupation; and finally, that wage labour is associated more with *majoora jaat* i.e. labouring castes (*chutkas*, dalits). Given the concentration of Ahirs in this hamlet, the employers of agricultural labour are also mostly Ahir and this works both ways. Either women are shy to work outside the village for other caste employers in view of their own caste status or would rather do wage labour in own village for same caste employers.

Extent of migrant work is even less. Only young men are involved in migrant work as: skilled or unskilled construction labourer, casual labourers, welder, electrician, driver, painter, one did electrical wiring work, one worked in a chemical factory, one was involved in carpet weaving and another in cloth weaving. A casual labourer simply said he did 'private work' and that he did not wish to elaborate because of the presence of many other fellow caste villagers. In isolated cases, migration is stable and income higher comparatively. Five men are in public employment: two in government coal companies, details of one were not clear other than he worked in 'cane union' (as told by his relatives) and the last refused to give details for fear that I would send the CBI after him! In these cases, migration is family based.

Most of the Ahir classes of labour households are marginal holders and few are landless. A significant proportion have leased in land and since many years. As the operational landholding size is actually greater, in rare cases, these households may hire in one or two labourers for paddy transplantation or if family labour is unavailable. Agriculture is mostly a subsistence activity. It is based on male and female family labour and exchange labour with neighbours and relatives. Young married women are seldom engaged in own cultivation. Livestock rearing is common and an important source of income. One man operates as a milkman i.e. he buys milk from villagers and sells it in a local market. He buys milk at sixteen or seventeen rupees per kilo and sells it in the market for a rupee or so more. Non-agricultural self-employment is rare. A couple run a small tobacco stall at their house. According to them, earnings are insubstantial. Two of their sons are involved in migrant work. No member does local wage labour. As the male head of the household put it, '*abhi samay theek chalta*' i.e. they are doing fine and do not need to undertake wage labour at this time (Fieldwork Notes, July 2010). The only other example is of a tiny grocery stall in the village, run by a *sadhu* (hermit) who also asked for *bhiksha* in nearby villages.

All households have one or more male and/or female members in local wage labour. Women (usual provisos regarding age and availability of supporting family members apply) are only involved in agricultural wage labour. Men did agricultural and non agricultural casual labour. Those engaged in brick kiln work moulded or carried head loads of bricks. They took advance in the off-season. In a couple of cases, women

were involved as unpaid attached family labour. Brick kiln work is remunerated on a piece-rate basis and therefore, output is important. When women took lunch to their husbands, they helped out in moulding bricks (watering new bricks, laying out bricks, carrying head loads), while the husband ate. One family cultivated only vegetables in their field and the male head sold these in weekly bazaars. Two men worked as taxi drivers. One was a dancer cum singer as a part of 'orchestra' that performed on weddings. The group may earn fifteen hundred rupees per performance and this is split among five to seven members of the group.

Fewer than half the households have one or more migrant male members. Types of migrant work included: skilled construction work, carpet weaving, welding, shuttering, cloth weaving, washing bottles, casual labour and one worked as an electrician. Migrant workers from one household are usually involved in the same work and in the same place. Livelihood activities other than sugarcane harvesting on *geda* basis by men were not observed. Women do not observe socio-cultural restriction to any significant extent, with the exception of young married women who are restricted to the house.

Chauhans: Some Chauhans are lower end petty producers and the rest belong to the classes of labour. Amongst petty producers, agriculture combines subsistence production and sugarcane cultivation to different extents. It is primarily based on family (including women with the usual provisos applying) and exchange labour. In rare cases, labourers are hired in peak season. Mechanisation is low. In few households, livestock rearing is undertaken as a commercial activity. Male members of only two households were involved in non-agricultural self-employment: as a fisherman and the other household combines this with a small general store at their house. Mostly men are involved in local labour commodification. Only two women did wage labour. Both are middle-aged and one of them only occasionally did wage labour. As put by the wife of a skilled construction labourer, her husband would not allow her to do wage labour even if he had to resort to begging. One man worked as a tractor driver. One owned a small thresher operated through their tractor and a male member used this for '*dauri*' i.e. threshing. Members of two households worked as insurance agents. Some others did casual labour and two men were involved in brick kiln work.

Half the households have one or more migrating men. In most cases respondents were unable to provide details other than that the migrants were involved in casual labour. It is common to see long term migration to where one family member has been based for a considerable time or is in service. Regarding public employment, one man worked with the Military Engineer Service, three households had members in government coal companies (one household had three members in it, including a woman who was given the job on her husband's death). Government service is linked to family based migration. Though women from Chauhan petty producer households do not strictly observe the traditions and customs as do some others, they are not involved in wage labour. They may undertake livelihood activities and men may be involved in sugarcane harvesting on *geda* basis.

In Chauhan classes of labour, agriculture is mostly subsistence-oriented and sugarcane cultivation is minimal. It draws heavily on family labour of men and women (with usual provisos). Exchange labour is less common. Livestock rearing is a commercial activity. There are only three instances of non-agricultural self-employment: a woman home based tailor, a widow operating a small grocery/tobacco store from home and the third household had a flour mill in which the female member also helped out. Almost all households have one or more members engaged in local wage labour. More men than women are involved in local wage labour. The latter do agricultural wage labour only. Men do this and non-agricultural casual labour. A common type is brick kiln work where they are involved in moulding, carrying head loads of bricks or carrying them on cycles and rickshaws supplied by kilns. These labourers often borrow money from kilns in the off-season and women may be involved as unpaid attached labour. Most male migrant workers are into casual labour, while skilled construction work and welding are the only migrant works indicating some skill. Many show stable migration patterns in type of migrant work undertaken and destination. Again, relatives often migrate to the same place. Remittances are rather low and irregular.

Though as many household members as possible pursue occupational multiplicity, young married women are restricted to the domestic economy. Women are involved in livelihood activities and men harvest sugarcane on *geda* basis.

Ansari: Majority of the Ansari households are petty producers and the rest belong to the classes of labour households. Most of the petty producer Ansari households are small or marginal farmers. Agriculture is primarily subsistence oriented. Ploughing operations are mechanised. Otherwise, agriculture is based on family (only senior women) and hired labour mostly, with few households engaging in exchange labour as well. As is typical of petty producers, the extent of hired labour is small and depends on the availability of able family labour. Labour is hired mainly for paddy transplantation. Male members from two households are ploughmen. Livestock rearing is a commercial activity.

Several men run petty businesses or trades from local markets. For example, shops selling footwear, readymade garments, electronic goods, medicines, cycle repair workshop, tailoring shop and general stores. There are few instances of general stores and one flour mill being located within the village where senior female members of the household help out. One man was a vegetable vendor. These self-employment activities reflect occupational diversification, resource base and are more respectable in comparison to Baniyas selling vegetables on the roadside and likely to better pay. Two women owned stitching machines, but only occasionally stitched clothes. Agricultural wage labour is undertaken by few households and mostly by men. Two women said that they did wage labour within the hamlet and among relatives only. One man qualified that he did wage labour only when needed. Male members of these households may also undertake other casual labour. Men were employed as car and tractor drivers, teachers, skilled construction labour and one instance of insurance agent and carpenter each.

Migrant work is a relatively important source of income. About half the households have one or more men engaged in migrant work like cloth weaving or stitching, carpentry, welding, skilled and unskilled construction work, wiring and one worked as a clerk. There are only two instances of family based migration, where one is a teacher and the other a civil foreman. As seen elsewhere, members of one household are often found in same type of work in the same city. The one example of public employment is of a male teacher in a government junior school. With the exception of young married women, their mobility and visibility was not rigidly controlled. For

instance, they could be seen outside their houses, tending to livestock or interacting with neighbours unlike the Brahmin or Rajput women. Their movement beyond the hamlet is as circumscribed as in the case of women generally. They may be involved in livelihood activities. Men harvest sugarcane on *geda* basis.

Ansari classes of labour are either landless or marginal farmers. Agriculture is primarily a subsistence activity and based on family (with usual provisos) and exchange labour. Livestock rearing is undertaken as a commercial activity. The two cases of female non-agricultural self-employment activity were of home based tailors. One charged fifteen rupees for blouses and fifty rupees approximately for suits. Her husband added that there are no fixed rates in village and people pay randomly. Men are into agricultural and other casual labour. Female members of fewer households are into agricultural wage labour. In two landless households, young married women also undertook wage labour. Migrant work is significant. Male migrant workers are involved in cloth weaving or stitching, starching saris, skilled construction work, leatherwork, pipe-line and iron work and car repair work. Social conduct of women is similar to those of women from petty producer Ansari households. Women are involved in livelihood activities and men in sugarcane harvesting on *geda* basis.

Khatiks: They are lower end petty producers and labouring households. Most petty producers are marginal households, few are small. Sugarcane is cultivated in small quantities. Agriculture is based on family labour (including relatively younger women). Exchange labour among extended family is common. In rare cases, labour is hired because able family labour is not available. Livestock rearing is a commercial activity. Less than half the households are into non-agricultural self-employment. Many men sell seasonal vegetables and fruits, which according to them is their caste occupation. They usually operate as peddlers or from along side roads. One had a fixed shop in the local market and earned approximately five to ten thousand rupees per month. The only other example of self-employment is that of a rickshaw driver.

Fewer households are involved in agricultural and other casual wage labour. Participation of women is even less in agricultural wage labour, may be limited to own village and undertaken occasionally. Non-agricultural employment is found only among men as security guards, head clerk in a private college, tractor and taxi driver.

The taxi driver worked for the pradhan. He had recently joined and according to his wife, he drove in 'vyvhar' (social relations) and was given one to two quintal grain by the pradhan from the PDS quota. Migrant work is undertaken by young men who are usually into casual labour, for example as coolies, potter, welder, truck driver etc. Only two cases of public employment existed. One was with the Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC) and the other in a sugar mill.

Khatik labouring households are either landless or marginal landholders. In this case too, agriculture is mainly a subsistence activity and based on family labour, including younger women. Livestock rearing is also undertaken for commercial purposes. Male members of few households are involved in other self-employment activities, primarily as seasonal vegetable and fruit hawkers. The only other examples are that of a fisherman and a rickshaw driver. More than half the households are engaged in local wage labour. Agricultural wage labour is the only form of female labour commodification. In very few cases, even younger married women do wage labour because of their precarious economic situation and lack of other family. Men are involved in non-agricultural casual labour as well. There is one example of a tractor driver and men from few households undertake advance based brick kiln work. Half the households have male migrant members. They are casual labourers mostly. In one case, it was family based. When in the village, these migrant workers undertake local wage labour.

As classes of labour, these Khatik households depend on the sale of their labour power for daily reproduction. There are isolated cases where they may own minimal productive assets as in the case of the rickshaw driver and fisherman. But mostly they undertake types of local wage labour perceived as demeaning and are lowly paid. Among Khatik petty producers and classes of labour, women (with rare exceptions of newly married women) do not observe seclusion or other restrictive practices. They are involved in livelihood activities. Men do sugarcane harvesting on *geda* basis. Practice of socio-cultural traditions inhibiting free movement and social interaction is not seen among women.

Gonds: They are also lower end petty producers and classes of labour. A little less than half the Gond households are petty producers. Most of these are marginal

farmers. Agriculture and livestock rearing show similar patterns as witnessed in the case of Khatik petty producers. In addition, three men are ploughmen and one of them also has a cart which is used to ferry men and material. There are few instances of leasing and in a couple of these cases land leased in is comparatively substantial. Male and female occupational patterns are also very similar. Two men are vegetable vendors. A household owned two generators and fancy lights which were rented out. Women only do agricultural wage labour. In certain cases they do wage labour only within the hamlet (also because their hamlet has employers unlike some other hamlets) nearby or only where they share close interdependent socio-economic ties with employers. Men are into agricultural and non-agricultural casual labour. Brick kiln work is rare. Other instances include an insurance agent, a teacher and one learnt welding for a token amount per day.

Fewer men do migrant work like construction work, painting, skilled construction work, welding and other casual labour. In the two cases where migration was stable and family based, these brothers had another brother in public employment in the same place. Migratory trends are influenced by changing family structure. The few men in government service worked with government coal companies, Delhi electricity department, PAC and in two cases the service details were unknown. In three cases, public employment is linked to family migration.

Gond labouring households are landless or marginal primarily subsistence farmers. Agriculture and livestock rearing patterns are similar to those observed previously among Khatik classes of labour. Agricultural wage labour for women and agricultural and other casual labour for men are the predominant types of labour commodification. Brick kiln work is found on a small scale, is advance based and may involve unpaid attached family labour. Migrant work is an important source of income. Only young men are involved in it. Types of migrant work undertaken are casual jobs like driving, dish washing, hawking, welding, starching saris, cloth weaving, skilled and unskilled construction work, coolie work etc. Women from Gond petty producer and classes of labour households are involved in livelihood activities and do not show any signs of inhibited mobility or circumscribed social interactions. Men undertake sugarcane harvesting on *geda* basis.

Chamar: Very few Chamar households are petty producers, rest are labouring households. The few petty producer households are marginal farmers and one is a small landholder. Sugarcane is cultivated in small quantities. Agriculture is based on family (including younger women) and exchange labour. Two of these households mentioned hiring in labour for paddy transplantation, if exchange labour could not be availed of. The only case of self-employment activity is of a male peddler selling bananas. Two women undertake agricultural wage labour and two men are into this and other casual labour. There is one case of migration, a casual male labourer.

Chamar labouring households are mostly marginal landholders and some are landless. Agriculture is mainly a subsistence activity, based on family labour. Relatively younger married women are more involved in own cultivation. Exchange labour is less common and organised among relatives and hamlet residents. Livestock rearing is a common commercial activity and in many cases, it is *batiya*. One man is a ploughman. He also has a cart used to transport material. The one example of non-agricultural self-employment is of a male peddler selling fruits and vegetables. Agricultural wage labour is very common. Women only do this. Men are involved in agriculture and other casual wage labour. A male labourer is learning stitching for fifty rupees per day. Another works as a rickshaw puller for a disabled man, who owns the rickshaw. When the rickshaw is being used by the owner, the labourer plies it in markets. Skilled construction work is another example. Though there are more men engaged in brick kiln work than Khatiks and Gonds, they are much less than the Mosahars. Migrant work is lesser. Migrant men are mostly into casual labour, two are in carpet weaving and one is a cobbler. In two cases, migration is family based. These migrant workers undertake local wage labour when in village.

Chamar women from petty producer and labouring households are engaged in livelihood activities and men in sugarcane harvesting on *geda* basis. Socio-cultural traditions limiting female mobility and interactions with own family and others is not seen to any significant extent.

Mosahars: All Mosahars households belong to the category of classes of labour. Majority are landless and the rest are marginal and small landowners. Unlike the Ahirs and Ansaris, Mosahars do not resort to leasing because they can hardly afford

farming costs and even if they can the uncertainty of lease is a big drawback. In cases of landowners, agriculture is mostly subsistence oriented, organised on family (male and female, including comparatively younger women) labour. Few draw on exchange labour with relatives and neighbours as well. One man worked as a ploughman. Livestock is a commercial activity and Mosahars reflect more instances of *batiya* livestock than other castes.¹⁵²

There are four cases of self-employment. A disabled man, who learned stitching in a local market, was provided a sewing machine by the district administration as a part of Mosahar development efforts. Though he has to pay for it in future, he earns more than he did at the shop. However, payments are often delayed and lower than market rates. Another man had taken credit from a *samuh* (micro-credit society or SHG) and used it to open a small general store in the hamlet. However, it hardly gets little business and the owner, whose land is mortgaged, has no money to buy any stock also. The third instance is also that of a man operating a general store from his home. Fourth, a fisherman sells his catch alongside the road in the local market.

Among the Mosahars there is very limited occupational diversification. But in general also, it is seen that even where diversification has occurred, caste is a major drawback. In the village, a Brahmin or Rajput is unlikely to go to a Dalit's hut, which anyways is likely to be located away from the main settlement area, to purchase tobacco or *bidi* (hand rolled cigarette). According to several dalits in the village, demand for milk sold by them is less because *badkas* do not want to drink milk that comes from their households (Kapadia [1995] makes a similar point). Also, castes are highly unlikely to take up self-employment activities which are not traditionally associated with them. For example, during the course of fieldwork it was observed that even where women wove baskets, hand fans and mats at home, they would not market these because this is not what their caste did.

Almost all households are involved in local wage labour commodification. Mosahar women undertake agricultural wage labour. Households seek to maximise wage-earners and income sources. Even young married women and older women do wage

¹⁵² *Batiya* means shared. For example, an animal is given to another for rearing and when it gives birth, one off-spring is given to the original owner and the other is completely owned by the latter.

labour, despite there being other productive family members available. There are few households that do not undertake wage labour due to old age or health reasons. Men undertake agricultural, other casual and/or brick kiln work. Brick kiln work is fundamental to their survival. Attached unpaid family labour is common. Many incur debt from kilns in the off-season. Other than this, there are very few examples of non-agricultural employment—a *tanga* (horse drawn carriage) driver and two tractor drivers.

Male out migration is not as common as one would expect in their case. Mosahars explained this with reference to their landlessness and the absence of even a minimum buffer against food security. This means that they have to be resident in the village to provide for the household on a daily basis. More so because, men undertake non-agricultural labour which is more readily available and pays more. This has to be read in conjunction with the trend of family nuclearisation. Another reason is that there is perhaps enough work for them to survive on, owing to a relatively large number of landowners dependent on hired labour, in the village and locally. An important reason for low migration is that many of these households are also indebted to the area kilns and cannot migrate in the dry season. In the wet season, agricultural work is available in the village. Poor networking is another handicap. There is a contractor, from nearby, who recruits some Mosahars for tomato farming in Nainital. Few other male migrant workers work as casual labourers elsewhere. Unlike other returning male migrant workers, Mosahar migrants extensively undertake local wage labour when in village.

Mosahar classes of labour depend directly or indirectly on the sale of their labour power for their daily reproduction and are engaged in most demeaning and debt based oppressive forms of wage labour. Their living conditions are the worst. The hamlet is located on a low lying ground and in monsoon certain areas are flooded causing damage to crops and houses. Their huts are tiny and low. Other than agricultural implements, productive assets are hardly seen (also see, Dhuru, 2008). Livelihood activities are common. Socio-cultural traditions circumscribing women's interpersonal relations and inhibiting their mobility are not seen.

Conclusions: Results of this mapping are quite similar to those seen in the previous chapter.

(i) There is significant internal variation among castes. Nonetheless, social, economic and political status and power coincide to a significant extent.¹⁵³

Table 6.5.: Caste-class Overlap in Dokh gadh

<i>Jati</i> (Total No. of Households)	Petty Capitalist	Petty Producer	Classes of Labour
Bhumihar (9)		9	
Brahmin (83)	46	27	10
Rajput (12)	5	6	1
Baniya (80)		54	26
Ahir (128)	1	55	72
Chauhan (60)		22	38
Ansari (97)		71	26
Khatik (70)		41	29
Gond (65)		29	36
Chamar (51)		6	45
Mosahar (128)			128
Total (783)	52	320	411

With one exception, upper castes are petty capitalists. Majority of the petty producers are OBC, followed by the upper castes and the dalits. Most of the dalits belong to the category of classes of labour, which also includes a fair number of OBCs. Very few upper castes belong to the classes of labour category. In sum there is a strong correlation between social and economic status and at the same time, there exists

¹⁵³ Figures mentioned in the following tables are good estimates. To reiterate, class positions are dynamic, particularly among the petty producers and classes of labourers. In some cases (particularly upper castes), some households are only into own cultivation, some mortgage parts of their land or resort to *bhiksha*, while some may also have members in public employment. These categories are not presented in the occupational tables, but have been previously described. Where they are in own cultivation, it is to be remembered that these are not 'classical' subsistence oriented family farmers. They are surplus producing farmers (to varying extents), subject to the logic and imperatives of capitalism.

differentiations within castes. This is in line with findings from Sapatganj and Baaspur.

Table 6.6.: Occupational Patterns of Petty Producers in Dokh gadh

<i>Jati</i> (Total No. of Households)	Local wage labour	Self-employment (excluding agriculture and livestock rearing)	Migrant Work (at least one member of the household)
Brahmin (27)	2	1	10
Rajput (6)	0	0	0
Baniya (54)	5	31	21
Ahir (55)	29	3	17
Chauhan (22)	9	2	11
Ansari (71)	19	20	34
Khatik (41)	14	16	14
Gond (29)	13	3	10
Chamar (6)	4	1	1
Total (311)	95	77	118

Table 6.7.: Occupational Patterns of Classes of Labour in Dokh gadh

<i>Jati</i> (Total No. of Households)	Local wage labour	Self-employment (excluding agriculture and livestock rearing)	Migrant Work (at least one member of the household)
Brahmin (10)	1	1	5
Rajput (1)	0	0	1
Baniya (26)	9	14	5
Ahir (72)	55	2	30
Chauhan (38)	35	3	20
Ansari (26)	13	2	14
Khatik (29)	17	8	15

Gond (36)	19	0	25
Chamar (45)	36	1	19
Mosahar (128)	112	4	31
Total (411)	297	35	165

Local wage labour is mostly undertaken by classes of labour, as is migrant work. Self-employment is more extensive among the petty producers. At a more disaggregated level, the caste based occupational profiling described show that castes have their own 'preferred' employment and income source. This, together with employment relations, is reflective of how different types of employment are perceived locally and the social status they signify and ownership of productive assets and some resource base. For example, as petty traders and migrant workers, Baniyas pursue their traditional occupation and evade oppressive socio-economic relations characteristic of agriculture. At the bottom, dalit classes of labour rely not only on local wage labour, but also the most stigmatised brick kiln work. The few self-employment activities are at best survival activities and cannot be taken as a real alternative to agricultural wage labour, compared to a JCB owner or even a garment shop owner. Their untouchability itself is an inhibition. Finally, some petty producers like Rajputs and Baniyas are definitely better-off than the Gonds and Chamars. These findings are similar to those of Sapatganj and Baasapur.

(ii) On the gender and caste based organisation of village labour markets, regarding occupational diversification and labour mobility and the sexual division of labour in agriculture, the findings affirm those mentioned in the previous chapter. Similarly, whether or not the role of agriculture in the reproduction of capital or labour is declining, needs to be investigated at a more disaggregated level. A related point is that migration is a more complex rather than a straightforward consequence of agrarian distress. In fact, in the most depressed castes like Mosahar labouring households, it is not a strong phenomenon. Based on their fieldwork in three western Indian districts, Mosse, et al. (2002) argued that it is mostly the poorer households who undertake long term migration. But these are not necessarily landless, a fact that can be inferred from Rogaly, et al. (2002) who mention that own cultivation and related responsibilities influence migratory patterns. In short, migration is a much

differentiated phenomenon in terms of causes, duration, labour arrangements and consequences.

My field findings reflect that migration does not figure prominently among the poorest, the landless. The plausible reasons for this were mentioned previously. Since, the thesis did not focus on migration per se, this trend was not analysed in detail. However, it finds resonance in de Haan (1997, 1999) who argued that in certain cases, landless are less likely to migrate because they cannot afford the expense of it and they lack the necessary social contacts. Guerin (2012), in the context of brick kiln migration in Tamil Nadu, also found that in a wet area, labourers are less likely to migrate. Labourers derive a strong sense of identity from the village or lack connections or do not want to miss out on the benefits associated with patron-client relations.

(iii) As in Sapatganj and Baaspur, a gendered caste-class hierarchy is evident in the local occupational structure. At the top are the *badkas* wherein socio-economic status and political power are strategically linked. At the bottom are the *chutkas*, concentrated in low status, low paid, irregular, exploitative jobs and employment relations, more so women, whether as wage labourers who do least paid jobs or unpaid family labour.

The above mapping exercise is used to analyse the general social relations and specifically, labour relations of dalit women from classes of labour households.

6.2. Rural Labour Relations of Dalit Women Belonging to Classes of Labour

The structure of this chapter and the issues discussed herein are the same as in the previous chapter. Much of the information from Dokhghadh is very similar to the other two villages and therefore, I will only briefly mention the main points and focus more on any difference.

6.2.1. General Social Relations: An Overview

Like in Sapatganj and Baaspur, in Dokhgadh as well, socio-economic relations coincide. *Chutkas* also express their political support along these lines. These ties cut across village geographical boundaries, closely following established routes of labour demand and supply. For example, the Gonds of the first hamlet do wage labour for other caste households in their own hamlet, other nearby hamlets and neighbouring villages. The Chamars and Gonds of the second hamlet do wage labour for the first and third hamlet primarily. The Brahmins of the fifth hamlet largely depend upon the labouring households of a neighbouring village. The Mosahars do wage labour for the prominent *badkas* in three village hamlets, apart from other villages bordering their hamlet.

Socio-economic relations in agriculture and the village more generally, are reinforced by the close proximity of employers and labourers. For most labouring households, employment relations were village based or at most, extended to neighbouring villages. However, it was noted that Mosahars take up wage labour in quite distant locations as well, but for food and credit, they largely depended upon employers nearer to their hamlet. So, while their employment relations were more widespread, they remained economically more dependent on and socially more integrated with employers from own village or nearby areas. Politically, they had largely bypassed the village political structure. I will return to this point in the section on labour struggles. Conversely, it was observed that though the village is 'geographically dispersed' over a large area, with few hamlets physically isolated from the main settlement, and economic relations were accordingly arranged, the political dominance of the Brahmins in the main settlement had permeated even these areas.

The concentration of political power in the hands of two Brahmin families was mentioned earlier. Political and economic rivalry between these two households is much pronounced, while such 'competition' in the case of other petty capitalists was not observed (but it was not absent altogether). A male member in each of these two households (the de facto pradhan and the contractor for a district government authority), has access to political power and resources. This access is used to

distribute 'patronage' (MGNREGA job cards and accessing work, BPL ration cards, old age/widow pensions, other government schemes and mediation with bureaucratic authorities) with a view to cultivating a benevolent image vis-à-vis labourers cum voters, establishing their authority and spheres of influence. The daughter of a former Ahir pradhan described her father as a social worker. She also mentioned that they possessed a BPL ration card, but gave the procured food to the needy. While the image portrayed is one of a benevolent benefactor, this household appeared sidelined from the 'mainstream' village politics unlike the above.

As in Sapatganj and Baaspur, divisiveness among the petty capitalists is a limiting factor on labour unity (by providing indirect benefits which privilege some over others) and dissidence. But this lack of horizontal solidarity at hamlet or village level does not translate into fragmentation of the upper caste-class alliance at the level of several villages or block. Petty 'power-games' are never directly played out in confrontation between them (except in contesting elections perhaps). Village petty capitalists disagreed with each other or expressed dissatisfaction with the pradhan, but none of them openly aligned themselves with either of these two Brahmin households, as the labourers did explicitly. At the level of villages or block *badkas* tend to close ranks. Here, caste plays an important unifying role. As a male member of my host family said, they have to politically support each other because they are of the same *biradri* (community). To some extent, the Mosahars have successfully challenged the Brahmin dominance or at least put them on a back foot, but without fundamentally upsetting the established power relations. This will be explained later.

On the link between political power and corruption as a source of income and accumulation, provision of unpaid labour services by women within *badka* households and the impact of male out-migration, the findings are similar to Sapatganj and Baaspur. How labour market appears at village level is also the same.

Movement of men out of agriculture is shaped by caste and land position (landless Mosahars do not migrate). Nonetheless, as in Sapatganj and Baaspur, it is the case in Dokhghadh landed households where men migrate, that women have taken on a greater role in agriculture than before. This may be truer of senior female members of concerned households. These economically precariously positioned households have

had to either lease out their land or hire in labour for tasks like paddy transplantation and various spade works. The extent to which this has led to women's movement from own cultivation to wage labour or intensified wage labour participation is not uniform and depends on factors like the family structure and size, availability of other productive family members in the village and age of women. For similar reasons as in the other two villages, returning migrant workers, particularly in the case of petty producers, do not like to undertake wage labour in villages. In comparison, dalit migrants are more likely to undertake local wage labour, mostly outside of agriculture.

In rare cases, casual migrant workers are accompanied by family members. It is possible that the migrant's wife works as unpaid attached labour. This was seen in the case of a Giri migrant worker based in Ghaziabad since eighteen years. His work involved washing and packing bottles. Remuneration is piece-rate based. His wife works alongside him, contributing to increased productivity and therefore increased wage. But only, the migrant worker is paid.

As we shall see, labour relations of women belonging to the dalit classes of labour are embedded in the overall socio-economic matrix of dependency relations.

6.2.2. Specific Aspects of Dalit Rural Female Labour Relations

The aspects looked at are the same as in the previous chapter: types of labour commodification, wage structure, recruitment and labour control and intra-labour and unfree labour relations.

6.2.2.1. Agricultural Labour Commodification and Wage Relations

We now know for sure that female labour is involved in only agricultural wage labour. This attributed to socio-cultural norms and 'rurality' of non-agricultural employment. Occupational diversification (particularly into other low status and low paid jobs or migration) and female wage labour participation, more generally, is conditioned by caste status and the dominant ideology that casts women as dependent and subordinate to male breadwinners. This was seen in Sapatganj and Baaspur as

well. It was also mentioned in the previous chapter that MGNREGA is widely perceived as a source of employment. Unlike Sapatganj and Baaspur, women in Dokhghadh have worked in MGNREGA projects but only Mosahar women. This has to be located in a wider context of labour struggles by the Mosahars, as will be elaborated in the following section. Traditional occupations are a possible source of non-agricultural employment, but as in Sapatganj and Baaspur, here also, this option is almost non-existent in dalit women's employment options. I found only one case of this: a Dom woman who sold woven fans. A woman, as a part of family labour in brick kilns, may also be involved in non-agricultural work, but this is best understood as unpaid and unfree labour.

As mentioned earlier, female labourers' agricultural wage labour participation is influenced and shaped by factors like family structure and size, age and socio-cultural restrictions, site of work and household economic circumstances. As one moves progressively down the labour hierarchy, these factors are not rigidly applied. But even at the bottom, caste and landownership are important determinants of wage labour participation and its nature. In the context of Sapatganj and Baaspur, it was pointed out that upper and medium caste labouring households are either unwilling to take up the wage labour for dalit employers, did wage labour occasionally or only within a small radius or those with whom they shared close socio-economic relations. In Dokhghadh, in addition to these factors, a Chamar male labour put in that no employer would ask *baba log* (Brahmins) to work in their fields, in the first place only. Other employers also mentioned recruiting labour from *chutkas*. Caste, in this sense, is a ground for discrimination in the village labour market. In other words, upper castes working for upper, medium or lower castes, is embarrassing for both, employers and labourers.

A landless upper caste household is more likely to undertake agricultural and/or wage labour and more often, in comparison to a landed (even marginal) upper caste household. A Giri woman, from a labouring household, pointed out that she was the only lady from her hamlet (predominantly comprising Giris and few Rajputs and Gonds who are the primary labouring households of this hamlet) to do wage labour.

She only worked within the hamlet.¹⁵⁴ According to her, an important distinction between her and dalit labourers is that she does not haggle with the employer over wages. She merely quotes the going wage rate for that task and the employer pays that rate. She saw wage negotiation as not befitting her caste status. She also mentioned that as a '*Brahmin*' she cannot work for a *chutka*. It is possible that since this is a Brahmin employer-Brahmin labourer employment relation, the employer might be more sympathetic or 'self-embarrassed'. Another reason is that both the employer and labourer are from the same hamlet and the former serves as a safety net against unforeseen casualties, food insecurity etc. Once she even went to sing at a *babu's* house, for which she was given hundred—two hundred rupees, food and clothes. So, there exist overlapping socio-economic relations even among upper and middle caste labourers and these possibly circumscribe their bargaining power. Similar cases were observed among several other upper caste female labourers.

Female members of even a dalit landed labouring household are unlikely to traverse long distances for wage labour. On the other hand, are the landless Mosahars. Female labourers from these villages even walk to distant Blocks for wage labour. Lack of landownership and the minimum food security attached to it, is a major reason for this. Mosahars are well known in the field villages as hardy stock, efficient and good agricultural workers, as extremely bold and brazen. This also has to do with their political activism, as we will see later.

As in Sapatganj and Baaspur, female labourers are involved in certain agricultural tasks, which are also the worst paid. In own cultivation, the sexual division of labour is not rigid. The wage structure and relations in Dokhghadh are similar to Sapatganj and Baaspur: a gendered wage gap exists attributable to the nature of work involved, physical ability of labourers and the dominant way of socialisation of male and female gender roles; wages are dependent on work nature and location and female tasks are mostly remunerated on daily wage rate basis; individual labour relations and caste of employers also influence wages.

¹⁵⁴ Giris are actually classified as OBCs in the Central List, but the respondent identified herself as Brahmin.

The slightly higher female wage rates in Dokhgadh are attributed to Mosahars. It is usually the biggest landowners who 'open the agrarian season' i.e. recruit labourers for, say, paddy transplantation. These employers depend on Mosahar labourers significantly. Mosahars are able to successfully haggle a slightly higher wage rate for the new season. The process of wage negotiation is the same as in the other two villages. The difference between Mosahars and other dalits is that the former show a high degree of labour unity, no doubt facilitated by the lack of internal economic differentiation. Therefore, they are able to put up a united front against the *badkas*. Unfree labour relations are a characteristic of them also, but as their hamlets are physically isolated and these are single-caste hamlets, the everyday social compulsions and threat of sanctions as seen in the previous two villages, is absent. Political pressure is limited, since they have successfully accessed block and district administrations for relief. The economic compulsion is omnipresent, but here too unlike other dalit labourers, Mosahars are not dependent on one or two employers. Above all, by virtue of extremely poor conditions and other reasons, Mosahars are on the 'watchlist' of the local media and government authorities. This, in addition, with the attitude of Mosahars and *badkas* apprehension of any possible Mosahar action, favours Mosahars in wage negotiations.

Despite this higher bargaining power, wages increases in successive seasons are not as high as one would expect. The wage rate once fixed at the start of a season, remains the same throughout the season, providing for other factors like debt relations. On the other hand, Chamar labourers pointed out that even if they broadly resolve not to work on last season's wages, one labourer may empathise with a particular employer and work for him on old rates. Consequently others will also have to agree to it. The ritual notions of superiority and inferiority, the natural order of things comes across as a much internalised phenomenon among non-Mosahar dalits. Their position and status in life is not questioned and there is a feeling that they cannot fight the *badkas*.

Unlike in Sapatganj and Baaspur, the possibility of contract work in weeding, within the village, is not completely absent in Dokhgadh. This is not common though, and is more seen in Mosahar labourers.

6.2.2.2. *Modes of Recruitment*

Recruitment patterns and criteria are as seen in the other two villages. Like Baaspur, the village does not have well defined labour parties or female contractors. The only difference with other two villages is that Mosahars underplayed the role of caste, capability and personal preferences in the selection of team members. Given the absence of other *chutkas* in their hamlets, caste obviously does not figure in their recruitment strategies. However, Mosahars are known not to forge alliances with other labourers in their struggles and no other dalit group also stated working with them. Recruitment is hamlet based. Mosahars of one hamlet do not call on Mosahars of another hamlet for work purposes. The two hamlets are also at opposite ends of the village. Within hamlets also, the immediate neighbourhood (and by implication, relatives and people with whom they are likely to share greater social and economic rapport) appears as a preferred area for recruiting labourers.

Another difference between Sapatganj, Baaspur and non-Mosahar labouring households on the one hand and Mosahars on the other, is that the latter denied deliberately limiting the number of workers for a contract job and forged a community spirit i.e. lead labourers think that as many as possible should work in a contract job because then they will all earn.

Like Sapatganj and Baaspur, overlapping socio-economic and political allegiances are important determinants of labour arrangements, as is debt-based recruitment in brick kilns. These may manifest within patron-client relations. These factors are also grounds for unfree labour relations.

Labourers', who openly aligned themselves with either of the two dominant Brahmin households or another petty capitalist resident in or nearer to their hamlet, did not work for the other or seek redress from them. For example, female labourers from the first hamlet said they did not approach the de facto pradhan for their problems with MGNREGA or pensions because they did not vote for him so do not expect him to help. They get no benefits from the de facto pradhan. They supported a resident petty capitalist Brahmin. Several women elaborated that they voted for him because he is the largest employer of wage labour in their hamlet, their lands are adjoining,

labourers take their goats to his fields for grazing and he is the first person they would approach in times of crisis. This petty capitalist has in the past mediated with government authorities on behalf of labourers, as has the Brahmin household other than the de facto pradhan's. Efforts of the former led to developments like electricity, paved roads and drainage facilities in the hamlet. Women were confident that he would help them in the future as well. Importantly, this petty capitalist also harboured political aspirations, so his actions were not really benign. In a kind of similar way, labourers also rationalise and base their decisions on a cost-benefit analysis.

According to female Mosahar labourers, some employers allow only those labourers to harvest grain who undertook weeding and paddy transplantation work in their fields. In this way employers ensure the availability of labour at peak season and also limit their bargaining scope. Since harvesting is remunerated in kind, it is an important element of households' food security. Mosahars spoke of this arrangement with reference to upper caste employers from another neighbouring village.

It was indicated in the mapping exercise that brick kiln recruitment is based on an advance system. This is similar to Sapatganj and Baaspur. Unlike in these two villages, male labourers, particularly the Mosahars, take out loans from brick kiln owners/managers to survive in the off-season. Though this work is onerous, and exploitative, brick kiln work is crucial to their survival. Some did not consider it as socially degrading, unlike the labourers of other two villages. Rather, for them it is better to take credit from kilns rather than repeatedly appealing to the *badkas* benevolence. Also, at kilns, labourers claimed that wage rates are not only higher but also timely paid. In general, debt appears as a means of survival in Dokhghadh but limits labourers bargaining power vis-à-vis employers, as in Sapatganj and Baaspur. These survival relations are evident in unfree labour relations as well.

6.2.2.3. Unfree Labour Relations

In Dokhghadh also no bonded labourers were seen, but labour relations and wider social relations show features of unfree labour relations.

How credit or overlapping socio-economic and political ties circumscribe labour relations has been dealt with. As in Sapatganj and Baaspur, here as well, women from classes of labour category provided unpaid, paid in kind labour or labour remunerated with a token amount by *badkas* within their homes. These women were mostly dalits, but unlike, in other two villages, few upper caste women from labouring households also delivered unpaid labour services. For example, a landless Baniya woman—deserted by her husband—did agricultural wage labour to support her self and her son. She even did *begari* for which she was remunerated in kind with ration. However, she does these within the hamlet only. She felt shy and self-conscious in going to other hamlets. This woman stressed that whenever she went to a Rajput household near her house, she was never returned empty-handed.

Providing *begar* services depended on the caste configuration of hamlets. Mosahar hamlets or those dominated by OBCs either did not reflect *begar* or to a very limited extent. But these labouring households do *begar* for petty capitalist households in nearby hamlets. Generally, these services are remunerated with a token amount of five or ten rupees or labourers are given grains. On ceremonies, some labourers may go for singing or playing the *dholak* (musical instrument) at a *badka*'s place for which they are paid more and often also given food and/or clothes. Few Chamar women mentioned that when they were called for cleaning and such work at weddings, the *badkas* only gave them some food.

It is common for women (but not in case of young ones) whose husbands are involved in brick kiln work to work with them as unpaid attached labour, but not if the wife is young. Men leave for kilns at about four in the morning. At around ten or eleven in the morning, women take lunch to kilns for their husbands. While they eat and take a short rest, women continue with the work. They are not actually involved in moulding the bricks but rather spread out and water the bricks, make the mixture etc. Brick kiln work is remunerated on a piece-rate based. So women participation is important as they enhance productivity and therefore wages.

Tied and priority services are common as well and take place along the same lines as in Sapatganj and Baaspur. In addition, in Dokhghadh, these may be tied to leasing arrangements. In one leasing arrangement, going back ten years, the lessee household

provided tied and priority labour services to the landowners which were remunerated at a much lower rate than the going wage rates. There is an implicit understanding that if they stop working for the owner, the leased land will be taken back. The leased land is important for this landless household for reasons of food security and also because they cultivate sugarcane on half the land and therefore, it is a crucial source of money. In another case as well, land had been leased out to a wage labourer who worked for the landowning household. In Sapatganj we had seen a similar arrangement, wherein the Rajput family had leased out a plot of land to a labourer who looked after their crops since the field was far away from their house.

6.2.2.4. Mechanisms of Labour Control

On this, there are no different findings from what was described for Sapatganj and Baaspur: employer supervision in the case of daily waged work and contractor supervision, in addition, to the in-built incentive of the contract in contract based work. Petty producer employers may work alongside labourers in daily wage work to avoid deliberate procrastination of work and ensure timely completion of good quality work. Regarding the profit motivation in contractual work, the *de facto* *pradhan* commented: *if male labour is given spade work on katha basis, they do up to five kathas per day, but on daily wages they do only two katha even if per day wage is hundred rupees*. Similarly, as in Sapatganj and Baaspur, where *badkas* pay less than the going wage rate (as is likely to be the case), it is common for labour to deliberately do shoddy work, whether in contract or daily wage rate. The contractors work alongside labourers and keep up a fast pace of work. But, according to few employers, though lead labourers and labourers get the same wage, the former do not do as much work or supervise properly. Delayed wage payment and/or withholding a part of the due wages is also common and a way to ensure labour supply in peak season particularly. In case of local upper caste employers, payments are almost always delayed because of socio-economic ties of dependency.

6.2.2.5. Intra-labour Relations

Dokhghadh findings are same as for Sapatganj and Baaspur on various issues: everyday issues; work related issues such as who has done how much work and

unequal wage distribution between lead labourers and other labourers of the team; on the fragmentation of labourers along lines of caste, locality, kinship and wider socio-economic relations; and exchange labour issues. There are two areas of difference between Dokhgadh and the other two villages on this theme. One has to do with the labour solidarity among the Mosahars which is facilitated by a high degree of socio-economic homogeneity among them and second, pertains to the relation between them and other labourers.

The first aspect is evident in the occupational profile of Mosahars. It has been mentioned previously in the chapter how this uniformity within the village favours Mosahars bargaining position. It was observed in other villages and hamlets in this village that labouring households face different socio-economic circumstances, varying land position and are beset with petty issues along neighbourhood and caste lines. Relative labour solidarity on issues like wage negotiation is temporary and undercut by independent economic circumstances of labouring households and personal ties. The total absence of *badkas* and other socio-economic grounds of differentiation bind Mosahar households together and give it a stronger leverage vis-à-vis employers.

On the other hand, the success of Mosahars in accessing public resources and setting higher wage rates has been a cause of jealousy and friction with other labourers who have not managed to secure these. Even the Mosahars of the last hamlet claimed to have been sidelined by the Mosahars of the bigger hamlet in their struggles, though the latter denied this. My field findings and observations show that though, the latter are the main protagonists, the former have not been as marginalised as they claim and have also benefited from these struggles. Chamar labourers (mainly women) berate the Mosahars for having no sense of shame and modesty, no '*vichar*' (consideration, judgement). They are different from Chamar labourers. Even if Chamars go to panchayat, they sit separately and are scared to speak up for fear of being scolded. They have a sense of modesty, a consciousness of their *chutka* status and their behaviour towards *badkas* is appropriately circumspect. The Mosahar angle will become clearer below.

6.3. Political Expression and Labour Struggles

On political expression, there are no different findings from Dokhghadh. Labouring households understanding and practice of politics is framed by caste, locality and everyday events and often follow lines of patron-client relations. This is not different from what was seen in Sapatganj and Baaspur. For example, like Baaspur, female labourers in Dokhghadh drew a parallel between the Mayawati-Brahmin coalition and the Chamar-de facto pradhan relationship. Or for example, the parallel between how Mayawati's government came to power on the platform of dalit votes but benefits have accrued to *badkas* more and how *badkas* have cornered government measures like loan write-offs or extension of subsidised credit. Yet another example is their belief that though government is astute because it reserves the pradhan's seat for *chutkas*, at times for women, in reality, the poor cannot become pradhan because they do not have the money to contest elections. There are other such similarities across villages, for instance, in some cases, women admitted attending (sitting apart from the main group) or eavesdropping panchayat meetings, but they do not participate because of the way the role of women is conceived and for fear of repercussions and public humiliation. Some female labourers noted that when government officials participate in the panchayat, labourers are not allowed to participate.

Female labour struggles, modelled on the basis of weapons of the weak, also do not show any variation from what was described in the case of Sapatganj and Baaspur. Like in Baaspur, there are scattered isolated incidents of labourers taking complaints to block or district administration. For instance, a group of Chamar labourers had approached the district magistrate to complain about their ration provisions and these households now get a regular supply of ration. However, the initiative was taken by someone from outside the hamlet. Here, I will focus on labour struggles of the Mosahars, men and women. It should be noted that where labour relations are concerned, Mosahar women show similar attempts (weapons of the weak and negotiations) at improving their position. Nonetheless, their struggles outside of immediate labour relations do have consequences for their employment relations, as indicated elsewhere in the chapter.

The extreme poverty and abject living conditions of Mosahars have been mentioned earlier. Their plight came to light about a decade ago with the death of a Mosahar man (from the larger Mosahar hamlet, the last hamlet in the list) in front of a police station. He was begging there, in a desperate attempt to save his family from starvation. Shortly before the death of this Mosahar, a local political activist had visited the hamlet and promised help to the Mosahars. But the incident happened before he could address the issue.

The death of the Mosahar, immediately focussed media and political spotlight on this hamlet. His wife was given compensation. All Mosahar households (including the ones in the smaller hamlet) now possess red BPL cards. They even have their job cards with them and though there are few entries, they are correct and the correct dues have been paid. The administration has constructed public toilets in the hamlet. Other labourers cribbed that whenever any public authority visited, they are taken to the Mosahar hamlet to show 'development efforts'. The administration held more checks here, new schemes are advertised here first and good quality ration is timely distributed in stipulated quantity. A disabled man has been given a loan for the purchase of a sewing machine. A panchayat *bhawan* came up in the hamlet. The wife has become a popular symbol of struggle and frequently attends block and district level meetings over Mosahar issues. This is unlike in Sapatganj, Baaspur and possibly atypical of other villages in the region as well. But then, so is their struggle for their rights.

The political activist is well known in the region for his work among the Mosahars. He has organised them across villages over issues of job and BPL cards, payment of dues, provision of more work under MGNREGA, against corruption etc. He has stood by the Mosahars through various crises, provides them with food, clothing, blankets etc whenever they have to travel to the district or capital city for holding or participating in a protest or rally. He has organised Mosahars (both men and women) to participate in rallies, hunger strikes, *dharnas*, *gheraos* at the block and district level administration and state level.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁵ *Dharnas* are akin to strike/sit out, show of strength. *Gheraos* literally meaning siege. It refers to encircling the target, usually the public servant who is the focus of grievance redressal and from whom relief is sought, until the demands are met.

With the fear of starvation death, a sense of collective has emerged. While earlier, Mosahars worked on daily wages, they can now get contract work. The stipulated amount is paid to them and if payments are not made on the same day, labourers stops working for those employers. A very strong sense of dignity and capability has emerged. Other factors that appear to have enabled Mosahars labour struggles have been previously stated.

Such activism has its limitations. The leading political activist is not from the village and only visits occasionally or contacts his 'point-man' who then spreads the passed information among the labourers. There is no person who has been trained as an indigenous leader from the Mosahar hamlet. Despite repeatedly asking, the Mosahars did not extend details of how they can afford such actions when other dalit labouring households claim that they cannot afford to take time out for such activities. Neither did they explain how from their meagre wages they are able to afford and pool money for transport to Lucknow (as the Mosahars claimed to fund their transport to different locations) etc.

Such activism does not incorporate other dalits and no explanation was furthered by the Mosahars on this other than remarking that those labourers want to benefit without struggling for the 'spoils'.

The other dalit groups remarked that they are never included by the Mosahars and that they cannot argue and fight like the Mosahars who have no shame and self-respect.¹⁵⁶ Other dalit groups also allege that Mosahars go for rallies and strikes because they get free lodging, food, blankets and not because they are motivated by a political or economic cause. But the fact remains that the Mosahars are definitely more aware of their rights. The fact that the panchayat is wary of them means that even under the limited availability of work under MGNREGA, the Mosahars are first put to work. The differential treatment meted out to Mosahars by the local administration and the

¹⁵⁶ Women described how the Mosahars abused the *badkas* for non-payment of wages, would literally take visiting officials by hand and show them the inside of their huts or force a spade in their hand and ask them to work and then see how much physical labour is involved.

fact that they have benefited much more than other dalit labourers, is a major source of envy among the non-Mosahar dalit classes of labour.

Whether Moshars labour struggles are an anomaly or an aberration in the region is a matter of further investigation. But the social and economic conditions of Dokhgadh Mosahars remains pitiful and there is similar evidence from other villages in the regions (For example, see Dhuru, 2008). Neither have their struggles led to substantive material improvements in their conditions, nor do they pose any systemic challenge. Nonetheless, struggles of Mosahars and other dalit labourers in Dokhgadh cannot be discounted and are reflective of their active attempts to improve their position. Success has been intermittent and limited, but benefits have been wrested.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

The objective of this thesis was to study labour relations and struggles of rural dalit female labourers from the classes of labour category in eastern UP. To research this, a caste and gender based mapping of dominant socio-economic relations in field villages was undertaken. In this chapter, we will see how the findings of this research corroborate, nuance or contradict existing literature. In the process, the contribution of this thesis towards ‘knowledge creation’ on the topic will be highlighted.

To start with, a case was made for Henry Bernstein’s framework as the best way to understand neoliberal agrarian transformations and labour. Bernstein’s notion of ‘classes of labour’ is taken as the point of departure for this thesis. Classes of labour refers to those petty commodity producers who are struggling to reproduce themselves as labour. Members of households belonging to classes of labour category are simultaneously engaged in various types of irregular and exploitative wage labour, self-employment activities and other value adding labour activities. These are combined with small-scale farming. Logically then, labour is highly mobile, fragmented and straddling different production locations and spaces in the divisions of labour. Though the concept of classes of labour has been previously used in the Indian context (for example, Mezzadri, 2009, Lerche, 2010, Pattenden, 2011), Bernstein’s framework of petty commodity production differentiation has not been applied.

In the subsequent sections, I will bring together the findings from the field villages on the mapping exercise, labour relations and labour struggles.

7.1. Caste and Gender Based Mapping of Occupational Relations

A caste and gender based mapping of the dominant socio-economic relations in eastern UP, using Bernstein’s framework has not been attempted before.

First, I state few general observations. The *jati* identity is the prevalent mode of caste identification. Not only is recognition with socio-political derivations or the official three fold caste categorisation limited, but there is disjuncture between *jati* and government categories as well. Caste and class coincide to a large extent. This overlap is reinforced through a strategic confluence of political and economic power and social status. Caste, class and gender intersect to varying degrees across the rural social structure and mediate women's position, socio-economic choices and conduct within the household and outside.

These observations find mention in other works cited in the earlier chapters of this thesis—Srinivas (1966, 1989) on the *jati* understanding of caste; Srinivas (1966), Deliege (1997) and Kapadia (1990) on local variations in caste perception. Studies on rural labour from Gujarat (Bremar, 1985), Tamil Nadu (Kapadia, 1995; Heyer, 2001) and Andhra Pradesh (da Costa & Venkateshwarlu, 1999) show a correspondence between labourers and low caste status. The interconnectedness among caste, class and gender is also well established, for example, Srinivas (1989), Ilaiah (2005) and Dube (1996).

In eastern UP, Lerche (1998) and Srivastava (1999) point out a caste-class overlap and Sharma (1985) has shown how caste, class and gender relations interact. In this area, this research makes an important contribution. The detailed mapping of socio-economic relations builds substantially on these areas. Regarding the first aspect, the detailed mapping of socio-economic relations undertaken in this research show that there is a caste-class overlap. At a broad level, the petty capitalists continue to accumulate and consolidate their dominance. At the other extreme, the classes of labour are caught in a poverty and debt trap, constantly struggling to secure their survival. Economic polarisation is a fact. At a disaggregated level, economic differentiation has also occurred as seen in the case of some OBCs and few dalits who have managed to access public employment and/or stable non-agricultural employment or migrant work. It is notable that there was no instance of a dalit petty capitalist.

Regarding the second aspect, Sharma's is the only existing work that draws linkages on caste, class and gender in eastern UP. She does this in the context of capitalist

developments in agriculture. This research does more than this. In line with Sharma, the findings of this research also show polarisation between men and women. This is observed in the labour market, production process, own cultivation and unfree labour. Mediated by class position, social status and backed by a patriarchal ideology, it is interpreted as a natural division, is internalised and maintained by female labourers themselves. The socio-cultural repression might not be so rigidly observed in the case of dalit women, but it is true even in their case that female subjugation and exploitation has enabled and sustained male 'freedom' as seen in men cornering better waged, better status wage work or resorting to migration due to economic and social reasons.

The empirical application of Bernstein validated its theoretical relevance and applicability in an Indian setting:

- (i) It definitively countered the notion of a subsistence-oriented homogenous peasantry and reiterated the complex variation within small farmers whose subsistence is commodified. It helped us to understand their class locations and how gender and caste do indeed mediate with class positions and shape the experience of exploitation and oppression.
- (ii) That identification of class locations required reference to conditions outside of immediate farming relations and agriculture is borne out by strategies of capitalist accumulation on one end and occupational multiplicity as encompassed in labour mobility and fragmentation in mechanisms of labour reproduction on the other end.
- (iii) Class analysis cannot be premised on a reductionist method of classifying classes on the basis of ownership of means of production. A household can simultaneously be exploiter and exploited, as with some petty commodity producers.
- (iv) Class locations are not static, but a dynamic process and social relation, combining elements of capital and labour.

The empirical findings of the mapping exercise confirmed and/or nuanced the generalisations put forth in the second and third chapters of this thesis.

In village labour markets, job distribution is shaped by gender and caste. A further aspect to the gendering of labour market is the sexual division of labour in agricultural wage labour. Gendered wage gap is a common phenomenon. This finding finds

support in Harriss-White (2003, 2004, 2005), Rigg (2006), Kapadia (1995) and Heyer (2011) in Tamil Nadu and Da Corta and Venkateshwarlu (1999) and Garikipati (2009) in the context of Andhra Pradesh. However, until now, we did not have this information for eastern UP. At best, male movement out of agriculture could be inferred from Lerche (1999), Srivastava (1999) and Diwakar (2004) who indicated increasing availability of alternate employment with reference to male labour.

Another conclusion is that the occupational structure reflects a gendered caste-class hierarchy, as described by Chen (2008), Harriss-White (2003, 2004, 2005) and Lerche (2010). At the bottom of the village labour market, are the agricultural and casual wage labour and brick kiln work. These are the most stigmatised, tedious, and exploitative forms of wage labour and often linked with debt and other forms of unfree labour. Non-agricultural forms of self-employment activities are far in between and appear as survival activities. However, based on his field study in eastern UP, Srivastava (1999) had noted in relation to male labourers that occupational diversification coincides with socio-economic status and labourers may resort to it as a way out of demeaning agrarian relations. In eastern UP, a comprehensive and systematic caste and gender based mapping such as undertaken here is not available. How intersecting caste, class and gender identities shape the role of women in the market and private sphere is either not taken into account or clearly established in works on rural female labour relations. There are stand alone references such as Garikipati (2009) and Kapadia (1995) or Paris et al. (2005) in eastern UP. As such, this thesis substantially adds to existing knowledge on this front at the general level and also specifically in eastern UP.

The gendering of occupational diversification leads to a very pertinent question. Untouchability is a ground reality. The market continues to socially and economically discriminate against the dalits and dalit women especially. In this scenario then, could it be possible that the State is the only logical hope of them procuring better waged and dignified employment, as teachers, para health workers and in MGNREGA? This is despite the MGNREGA's limited benefits and it reifying existing power relations. Even though women are unwilling to disturb the established gendered division of labour—a source of unequal gender relations and power—state sponsored work programmes can potentially challenge establish gendered roles by providing work to

men and women under similar terms and conditions of work (provided women are educated about their rights). Such 'non-traditional' female wage labour participation is likely to find wide societal acceptance as well. This is a subject of further research and likely to have important policy implications. In a somewhat similar vein, earlier in the thesis, we saw that Patnaik (2003a) had linked rural poverty to declining government expenditures on rural employment generation schemes in this neoliberal era.

Literature referred to in the second chapter indicated the decentralization of agriculture in the reproduction of capital and labour (for example, Bryceson, et al., 2000; NCEUS, 2007). The findings presented in this these show that the dependency on agriculture in the reproduction of capital and labour needs to be studied at a disaggregated level and has to be qualified on the basis of caste and gender. On this, there is no uniform picture. For example, my findings suggest that there are certain petty capitalist and petty producer households completely reliant on agriculture only. They are either surplus producing farmers as is the case with petty capitalist or their caste is a limitation on their local wage labour participation as is the case with small surplus producing petty producer Brahmins for whom credit against their land and limited practise of their traditional occupation are the major sources of sustenance. At the other extreme are dalit classes of labour. In this case, own cultivation is a minimum buffer against hunger and abject poverty. Agricultural wage labour is crucial for female labourers wherein they are the day to day providers of their households in the face of male out migration. Here, the importance of agriculture cannot be denied and to this extent, female labourers are dependent on agricultural wage employment and on landowners for various socio-economic reasons.

That migration takes place along gender and age lines was borne out by the fieldwork. This is supported by Lerche (1999), Srivastava (1999) and Paris et al. (2005) in eastern UP. Even though migration was not systematically investigated in the field, the findings presented in this thesis on this aspect are important interventions. The mapping exercise also showed that at a broad level, migration is a significant trend for social and/or economic reasons but at a disaggregate level, the link between classes of labour and migration as a mechanism to cope and spread risk is not straightforward.

Declining participation of male migrants in own cultivation has added to the burden of women who anyway faced increasing responsibility for ensuring daily household reproduction in the absence of men. Yes, migration is undertaken for social and economic reasons, but not only does the repressive patriarchal gendering of social roles deny women this opportunity, but may even lead to their marginalisation/withdrawal from production processes and thereby concentrate accumulation only in the hands of men. On top of it, male out migration has pushed women into performing unfree labour, as a part of debt or patron-client relations. Finally, the weak link between migration and the landless position is contrary to those of Paris et al. (2005). However, as pointed out by de Haan (1997, 1999), in certain situations, the poorest and landless are less likely to migrate because they cannot afford even the minimum expense involved in migration and because they are likely to lack contacts in source or destinations areas that could facilitate migration. In my field villages, both factors hold true in addition to others identified in the text.

7.2. Rural Labour Relations of Dalit women belonging to Classes of Labour

On this topic, the thesis makes an original contribution in the area. At best, existing literature on eastern UP either indirectly hints at, or refers to isolated specific aspects of female rural labour relations as a consequence of changes in male labour relations. Where such evidence exists, I will relate it to my field findings.

Rural labour relations are a part of the wider framework of unequal power structure and overlapping socio-economic relations in the villages. There are various aspects to this, all reinforcing labour dependency on the dominant caste-class for food, credit, access to fields for grazing livestock, fodder collection, defecation, *badkas* mediation to access to loans and other government provisions and for protection from structures of authority and power. The extent of dependency is influenced by factors like proximity, history between the ‘patron’ and ‘client’ households, and geographical layout of the village.

We saw that caste and cultural ideology are important determinants of wage labour participation and practises, as are other factors like the caste equation between employers and labourers, the prospective cost-benefit analysis by labourers, ‘rurality’

wage labour and passivity of female labour (Dreze and Khera, 2009). These factors are not accorded central importance in most literature. In the case of eastern UP, only Sharma (1985) has made limited references to one or two aspects.

On wage structure and relations and modes of employment, my findings conform to those of Kapadia (1995), Heyer (2001), Ramachandran (1990) and Athreya et al. (1990). Based on my findings, I agree with Harriss et al. (2010) that wage structure is influenced by government policies and level of politicisation of labourers. On the issue of wage negotiations, my findings differ from the above. The major point of departure is that contrary to Kapadia (1995) or Lerche (1994, 1995) and Srivastava (1999) in eastern UP, my findings establish that rather than an organised and confrontational approach, wage hike demands take the form of informal, unstructured persistent negotiations and haggling. However, there are similarities as well between my findings and the general and eastern UP literature, for example, regarding timing of such demands or how these may be limited by individual socio-economic circumstances and patron-client relations that serve to keep labour divided. My findings differ from other works in highlighting the role of limited economic polarisation (in addition to other factors) and in the creation of a strong labour lobby in wage negotiations. In eastern UP, though Lerche (1995, 1999), Srivastava (1989) and Ruthven and Kumar (2002) argued that general dependency of male labour on capital underscored wage relations, we did not have details of these aspects vis-à-vis female labourers till now.

The labour recruitment and discipline patterns in the field villages are as found in existing general literature highlighting how the mode of employment determined recruitment type, the role of local identities, individual tied or patron-client relations and general grounds of labour dependency in securing and controlling labour. This is seen in Kapadia (1995), Pattenden (2011) and Athreya (1990). I did not find tied harvest and labour arrangements as described by Garikipati (2009) and Da Corta & Venkateshwarlu's (1999) fieldwork in Andhra Pradesh. In Dokhghadh, harvest wage labour was linked to transplantation wage labour. This secured timely labour in peak season and also limited their bargaining leverage when the labour market is tight and there is a higher possibility of successfully getting a wage raise. Nonetheless, this was not common. In eastern UP, no information was available till now on recruitment

style and labour control mechanisms of female labourers, other than Lerche (1999) and Srivastava (1999) highlighting employers accessing unpaid family labour in tied labour and leasing arrangements as a means of securing cheaper and on demand labour.

On labour bondage, my findings support the generalisation that old style labour bondage is displaced with the development of various unfree labour arrangements as a part of capitalist social relations (Ramachandran, 1990; Garikipati, 2009; Da Corta & Venkateshwarlu, 1999; Kapadia, 1995; Heyer, 2001). Shankar (1996), Ruthven and Kumar (2002), Lerche (1995, 1999, 2003) observe the same in eastern UP.

Conspicuous by its absence in the field chapters, is the concept of neobondage. Elements of unfree labour relations observed in the field cannot be subsumed under Breman's (1985) definition of neobondage. These unfree relations are not just economic, contractual or impersonal. Other than credit, they are based on labourers' social and economic expectations from their patrons and very much draw on a personal familiarity and shared history. In eastern UP, Bardhan & Rudra (1978) and Ruthven & Kumar (2002) pointed out that unfree labour relations are associated with advantages like access to food, employment etc. Neither can these unfree labour relations be associated with the dissolution of inherited notions of purity-pollution based superiority-inferiority between *badkas* and *chutkas*. Contrary to Breman (1985) and Da Corta & Venkateshwarlu (1999), women still reflect a strongly engrained sense of superiority/inferiority and the embarrassment cum humiliation of being a dalit, the only exception being the highly politicised Mosahars of Dokhghadh.

As shown in field chapters, it may often be the case, that these unfree labour relations are willingly undertaken by women. This has to do with a general fear of *badkas*, general grounds of labour dependency on their employers, wider patron-client relations that serve as an insurance and safety net and increasing responsibility of women to provide for the household on a daily basis in the absence of migrant male members. de Neve (1999, 2005) showed that labourers sought advance from their employers, for economic reasons, but their attempts to maximise advance and changing employers is symbolic of their struggles against these employers. Heyer (2001) made a similar point, arguing that this reinforced their dependency. Pattenden

(2011) has also linked patron-client relations to unfree labour relations. In the context of east UP, Bardhan & Rudra (1978) and Ruthven & Kumar (2002) pointed out certain labourers, the worst off especially, may even seek to maintain these. But again, this is done with reference to male labour.

From eastern UP, the evidence on unfree labour relations shows that it generally take the form of interlocked tied-labour-credit relations (Bardhan and Rudra, 1978; Srivastava 1989; Lerche, 1999 and Rajni, 2007). Though debt as an important basis of securing cheap and priority labour was borne out in my fieldwork as well, this was not linked to land via leasing or tenancy arrangements. Rather, unfree labour relations appear as tied and priority labour services, unpaid attached family labour, *begar* provided by women within *badkas* households and very few land-labour-credit tied relations.

Until this research, the element of unfreedom in labour relations of dalit women from the classes of labour households had not been investigated in eastern UP, other than referring to them as attached family labour in tied credit, labour and land relations (Lerche, 1999; Srivastava, 1989). In documenting unfree labour relations of women, as independent labourers or as part of a household, this thesis makes an original contribution to the theme in eastern UP.

Intra-labour relations have not been an important subject of study within works on rural labour relations. One exception is Kapadia (1995) which lends support to my findings. In this case, the findings presented in the field chapters add to the limited available literature generally and specifically in eastern UP where data on this is also scanty. For example, Ruthven and Kumar (2002) highlighted strained relations between local and incoming migrant labour and Lerche (1999) highlighted the different socio-economic power matrices confronting male labourers of different hamlets. The former point was not explored in this research. On the latter point, my findings are the same. This is the sum of available evidence, apart from the general remarks about labour fragmentation along social and economic lines. As such, this research can be seen as making a valuable contribution on this front.

7.3. Political Expression and Labour Struggles

Here, the purpose was to gain an understanding of the ways in which female labourers challenged their domination and sought to improve their position as labourers. On this theme, no work exists in eastern UP.

My findings show that, commonly, labour struggles take place along the lines of Scott's (1985, 1986) weapons of the weak thesis and Jeffery and Jeffery's (1996) analysis of how women negotiate with, rather than confront, structures of oppression. In the second chapter, it was suggested that labour struggles are likely to take these forms in view of the nature of classes of labour-fragmented, embedded in local and particularistic identities and lacking a common class interest. On the politicisation of labourers and their struggles, Lerche (1994, 1995, 2000, 2003) and Srivastava's (1999) works provide detailed evidence on male labourers in eastern UP. My findings on female labour struggles conform to their assertions and add new insights regarding female labourers.

I am in agreement that an overlapping caste-class consciousness is the principle organising fulcrum of labour struggles, despite economic differentiation among caste groups. While the demands of wage hike or BPL cards can be perceived as class issues, this is not separated from an overlapping caste consciousness. Struggles of dalit labourers from one hamlet do not include dalit labourers from another hamlet, much less from other non-dalit labouring households. Even within the same hamlet, the worst off are likely to stay away from participating in these struggles, an observation also made by Lerche.

My field findings show that in the case of women, caste is most basic medium of associating oneself with a particular political party. Women's understanding and critique of politics is based on their everyday observations and experiences. These reflect that for them caste is not delinked from class. Women are able to relate village politics to regional level political phenomenon, albeit on a limited basis. This is despite their marginalisation from village political processes due to gendered roles.

As observed by Lerche and Srivastava, labour struggles are restricted to the hamlet level and circumscribed by specific social, economic and political contexts in which households operate, including individual economic circumstances and patron-client relations. Nonetheless, as Lerche has argued labour struggles can occur even within the framework of unfree labour relations or patron-client relations. At a more general level, Alavi's (1973) conclusion that labourers' political response is limited by their dependency on oppositional landlords is found to be true in the field villages.

Both, Lerche and Srivastava, stress on the role of occupational diversification in enhanced labour assertion. My findings show that this could indeed be the case, but the examples are few and far in between. Occupational diversification might have greater social consequences in terms of male withdrawal from demeaning work, but for women this occupation diversification may create new grounds for economic dependency and which in any case, does not eliminate the general rounds of labour dependency on *badkas*. In fact, male occupational diversity might end up reifying existing gendered relations. For example, we saw that some migrant workers pressure the women of their households to withdraw from wage labour and by extension, further limit their scope in the public domain. But we also saw that in the absence of migrant family members, women are likely to continue with wage labour. This is reflective of their economic vulnerability and general dependency on the *badkas*. In this sense, da Corta and Venkateshwarlu (1999) have rightly pointed out that women's exploitation subsidises male labour struggles. This is also evident in declining participation of returning male migrants in agriculture.

Overall, the BSP regime has imparted dalit labourers a sense of security and empowerment. However, the BSP's 'politics of dignity' does not appear to have successfully countered the shame and embarrassment of being a *chutka* that female labourers expressed. This has to be read in conjunction with women's lack of confidence and their compartmentalisation as male dependents.

Such labour struggles constitute more of a symbolic rather than a systemic challenge to generalised *badka* dominance. They have not led to substantive material improvement in the work and living conditions of dalit labourers. These struggles are erratic and issue based and often reflect a personal vendetta. Female labourers'

awareness of their exploitation and even a comparatively high level of politicisation, as seen in Mosahars, does not translate into a class for itself action. This is because classes of labour are internally divided along social and economic lines. This limits the evolution of a purely class based collective conflict and at the same time reinforces capitalist dominance. This is similar to what Lerche observed in relation to male labourers. But whatever said and done, the fact remains that these weapons of the weak and negotiations with oppressors are important means through which women assert themselves and wrest concessions. Importantly, they show that female labourers are not ignorant and passive victims of capitalist exploitation. They are fully aware of the limitations of their struggles and the structural context of employment scarcity which perpetuates their subjection to *badkas*. I did not come across any open confrontation between employers and female labourers. The latter are not engaged in a struggle between classes in a Marxian sense. Depending upon individual circumstances, female labourers seek benefits by working with the tide so to say, rather than against it. The element of physical aggression by capitalists that Lerche and Srivastava write of is not found vis-à-vis female labourers. Here, the gender factor could be a positive.

The Dokhghadh Mosahars present a different picture. At one level, female labourers resort to similar weapons of the weak and negotiations. But beyond the village (the outcomes are village based though), they have taken on a more aggressive and directly confrontational stance, have successfully managed to access political power and have gained economically from this. This is facilitated by few other factors indicated in the previous chapter. It is notable though that at this level, female labourers have not achieved this independently of male labourers. Here, labour struggles draw on a strong gender and caste labour solidarity. But this solidarity, as well as that seen in labour struggles for wage hikes in other villages, should not be interpreted as a conventional Marxian class struggle, despite being driven by extreme economic deprivation. The capital-labour contradiction is diluted by fragmentation among labourers on various non-class identities which preclude the formation of a strong unifying class identity and along the lines of patron-client realtions. In Dokhghadh, the labour solidarity is limited to the Mosahars in the hamlet. There is no attempt to integrate the Mosahars from another hamlet or dalit labourers from other hamlets. It is indeed true that Mosahars are the worst off among dalits and the

‘advertisement’ of their plight has taken on a strong caste hue. Even in this hamlet, the organisational initiative has come from an external source. So, their dependency on middle people has not been eliminated even though village level politics are bypassed. The Mosahars show the strongest connections between the local, meso and regional level politics and reflect a stronger sense of confidence and self-worth. But their struggles continue to be sporadic; issue based and take place within the existing unequal power structures.

Overall, this research is an important contribution on understanding and analysing labour relations of female labourers from the classes of labour category in a much under researched area. On the one hand, its microscopic focus is advantageous: apart from methodological imperatives mentioned in chapter four, it affords a detailed analytical research on a subject which has been marginalised and muted in the mainstream literature. This countered established dominant perceptions and provided interesting insights. As such, this research could be an important input in relevant policy formulation processes, to understand the myriad and complex web of identities and relations in which women operate, how they are inhibited by these and how women bend or work around these. On the other hand, the microscopic nature of this fieldwork is disadvantageous because it leaves unanswered the question of to what extent can the findings of this thesis be generalised. This thesis did not focus on agriculture, but it definitely highlighted its continued importance for female labourers essentially and therefore the need to bring back agriculture again to the centre of Indian policy discourse. Similarly, this research highlights that in an Indian context how tightly are class, caste and gender identities (and possibly others, depending upon the motives and work of individual scholars) woven together. An obsession with either one of these without considering the others is at best a partial investigation.

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Appendix

Appendix 1:

Initial Survey (For All Households in the Village)

1) Name of the main respondent:

2) Address:

3) Caste and traditional occupation:

4) Caste Category: Upper, OBC, MBC, SC, ST

5) Duration of residency in the village: less than 5 years, 5-10 years, 10-15 years, 15-20 years, more than 20 years, several generations

6) Classification of households on the basis of land:

Possessing own land and area

Possessing land but not their own (leased in land) and area

Landless

7) Intra-household occupational structure (in case of a migrating member or household note-the duration, destination in terms of the place and sector, remittance and migrating since when-as told by the other members of the household or neighbours):

Member of the Household

Occupation

Other Sources

(name, sex, age and marital status)

(wage-work)

of Livelihood and
Remuneration (in
cash or kind)

8) Economic status of the household (here it refers to the relative status within the village and maybe filled taking into consideration the category of ration card being

held, the respondent's reply and the impression of the researcher): Upper, Middle, Poor, Poorest

9) Main forms of labour commodification and remuneration in the village (break down broad categories like agriculture into specific tasks; identify sexual division of work/specific tasks and remuneration for each of the work category/specific task which maybe in cash or kind):

10) Any Other Comment

Appendix 2
District-wise rural S.C. population and number of Female Agricultural Labourers (2001)

S.No	District	Rural S.C. Population	Number of Rural Female Agriculture Labourers ¹⁵⁷
1	Allahabad	909877	205111
2	Azamgarh	978190	172704
3	Ballia	427233	125277
4	Chandauli	370520	80664
5	Deoria	462853	111857
6	Fatehpur	544000	127513
7	Ghazipur	624327	129866
8	Gorakhpur	738613	182483
9	Jaunpur	830942	127467
10	Kaushambhi	447782	102987
11	Kushinagar	511093	200357
12	Maharajganj	408584	187893
13	Mau	387310	83596
14	Mirzapur	528102	115539
15	Pratapgarh	584713	146647
16	SantRavidasNagar(Bhadoi)	273591	30612
17	Shrawasti	214747	63830

¹⁵⁷ Female agricultural labourers are concentrated in Kushinagar, Maharajganj, Gorakhpur, Pratapgarh and Siddharthnagar. But at the same time, in these districts the number of male agricultural labour is much more than female agricultural labour (GoUP, 2008). Azamgarh, Jaunpur, Maharajaganj, Mau, Pratapgarh, Sant Ravidas Nagar, Sonbhadra and Varanasi are the only districts where female labour is more than male labour (GoUP, 2008). It maybe argued that from the point of view of the research topic, the latter would have made for a more relevant and interesting case assuming that for various reasons male labour is either migrating out or moving out of agriculture and its place is being taken by female labour and how being in majority affects their power and position in the labour market and various social relations they are engaged in. However, this situation is not typical of the eastern UP region. Also, the literature review suggests that migration from the region is largely seasonal with respect to 'classes of labour' and that within agriculture there exists a sexual division of tasks which is not impacted by migration or by the resident numerical strength of male agricultural labourers. Jaunpur and Varanasi are also districts which have been previously worked on, while Mau and Azamgarh were ruled out because of safety reasons.

18	Siddharthnagar	329410	140104
19	Sonbhadra	577098	103304
20	Varanasi	333985	58561

Source: GoUP., 2008, *Statistical Abstract: Uttar Pradesh*.

Appendix 3

The Sapatganj Rajput Household

[i] Livestock rearing is not a commercial activity. For example, the Sapatganj Rajput family owned two cows. Cows are considered holy. At all meals, the first two *rotis* (type of bread) were served to the cows. The family sold surplus milk (at below market rate) to a villager who is actually in 'tied' labour relations to this family. On rare occasions, on a needs basis, a villager may be given some milk as a sign of goodwill and in patron-client framework.

[ii] Regarding local non-agricultural employment, the Sapatganj Rajput family had a transport business. The eldest son owned a truck. At the time of sugarcane harvesting, the truck was used to transport sugarcane from the village to the sugar mill. The eldest son also operated as a contractor. The villagers would sell their sugarcane to him at a commission. Labour was hired to load sugarcane on the truck, which was then sold to the mill. The villagers were paid by the Rajput son on the basis of quantity. The truck was occasionally hired out as well. However this business was not profitable and was shut down eventually. According to the owner, the overhead costs of maintaining and running the truck were very high. Since he himself did not drive the truck and did not have much knowledge about it, he could not monitor and control the costs, and had to rely on the driver. During the duration of the fieldwork, the truck was rarely seen in operation and towards the year end it was sold. His family has bought land in Gorakhpur where eventually they some family members will move and settle. They plan to hire a manager to look after their agricultural interests in the village.

The dentist and lawyer are based in Lucknow where they live in a rented house and have separate established clinic (as a part of some trust/foundation) and court chamber respectively. The family of the dentist lives with him. The younger son was recently married and his wife is expected to be based in the village for some time before she joins her husband. The family has also purchased land in Lucknow where they will build a house in the future.

[iii] The extent to which patriarchal socio-cultural norms are imposed on women depends on gendered relations within the household generally and women's position in relation to life-cycle changes. For example, overall, the female members of the Sapatganj Rajput family, practice strict seclusion. However, at most, the wife of the male head of the household may supervise labourers on the plots adjoining the house. During the entire fieldwork, only once did she go to a further away field further in the village and this too in an emergency situation. Women are responsible for all domestic chores. The youngest daughter-in-law bears most of the burden. She is also not allowed to appear in front of other villagers, male (with the exception of the immediate family members who are younger to her) or female (with the exception of the immediate family members), irrespective of their socio-economic status. Her seclusion is so extreme, that if she goes to the terrace, she cannot stand on the edges and look over at the village. She cannot step out of the house without veiling herself. If male members from her maternal family are visiting, she asks the mother-in-law or the eldest sister-in-law, if she can take them to her room and she does not even sit on the beds of her brother-in-laws.

On the other hand, the Sapatganj Rajput family's eldest sister-in-law keeps her head covered only in front of the senior male members of the family or when stepping out of the house. Within the house, she can come in front of others and interact with them. But it is only the wife of the male head of the household who can actually go upto the front door, and she too is required to keep her head covered. Irrespective of age, it is a given that all women are to wear saris, speak and conduct themselves in a polite and subservient style (for example, first the male members are to be served meals; they do not contradict their husbands in public, all decisions are to be 'consulted' or 'approved' by the male head or his wife who then takes it to her husband). In Lucknow, these practices and 'rules of etiquette' are not followed by the daughter-in-laws unless the father-in-law happens to be visiting.¹⁵⁸

More generally, senior Rajput women can sit on the front door-step, go out in the courtyard, engage in conversation with villagers passing by (men and women) and

¹⁵⁸ For example, the less strict social codes allow women to wear salwar suits, not covering their heads, and to enjoy unrestricted and independent mobility, Muslim visitors are served with the same utensils as Hindus, there are no separate arrangements regarding the cooking gas burner and utensils for cooking non-vegetarian food as is the case in the village.

they do not practice purdah. The one example of a Rajput woman working as a teacher does not pose any challenge to this order. Though she walks to the school and back alone, she has to observe a long *ghoonghat* i.e. she veils her face with her sari. When she crosses the Chamar hamlet, she is the object of 'public gaze', everyone trying to catch a glimpse of her, with children following her or other villagers pointing her out as '*memsaab*' (madam). Also, public employment is anyways much glorified and as a teacher she is not taking over a man's job.

Appendix 4

Oral Histories

(Italics are used for local terms, italics within inverted commas are used for quoting the respondent, and own comments are put in []). Respondents' names have been changed to maintain confidentiality.

4.1. Parveen (Dusadh)

Over the year, alternative employment opportunities have opened up-petty trades like general store owner, cycle repair shop, vegetable vendor; tractor driver; coolie work; brick kilns; migration etc. All castes are involved in such work, '*ji ka gun, jo seekh le*' i.e. whoever has skill and can learn. Better off open shops like a general store at the village junction, poor open tiny makeshift shops like a cycle repair workshop in the village, outside their homes. These changes have been almost exclusively been limited to men. Only in rare cases, if the shop is located in the village, outside the house, can female members of the household be seen sitting at the shop sometimes. She has not benefitted from these developments, only those who own these shops or kilns or work there, benefit.

More than twenty years ago, different crops were grown and the produce was for own consumption and not sale, whether one was a poor labour or *zamindar* (landlord). Over the last twenty or so years, sugarcane, rice, wheat, corn, potato, peas, mustard etc have become predominant crops. The shift in cropping pattern is explained with reference to timely availability of fertilizer from public outlets and irrigation facilities. Earlier, in the absence of these, the produce would be less and there would not be enough food to eat. People would just consume '*maad* (starch water) or *saag* (leafy vegetable)'. In recent years, there have been increases in yield due to the use of high yield variety seeds. Parveen has heard that in the time when her in-laws worked as wage labourers (at least thirty years ago), agricultural work was available through out the year. They would receive rupee one or even less for a whole day's work and at times, labour was mostly paid in kind with grains and foodstuffs which it would bring home and cook at the end of the work day.

Mechanisation was introduced in the area at least about a decade or so ago. Rice and wheat harvesting is mechanised. Earlier seeds and fertilizer public outlets were located at the district which made their timely acquisition difficult, and also because of the much stringent procedures involved like depositing money and 'pass book'. Now the seed and fertilizer outlets are situated at the village junction and are much easy to acquire. As a result of mechanisation, not much work in agriculture is available. Only lower castes and those with small plots are still dependent on manual labour. In own agriculture, they do all agricultural operations with the exception of ploughing themselves. In very rare cases where they are unable to do so, they may hire one or two labourers for money or food. Ahirs and Guptas with upto three *beeghas* of land may also undertake agricultural operations manually because they have enough family labour. They might hire tractors for ploughing, but do not have enough money to hire machines for harvesting. Bhumihars possess relatively larger plots of land. They employ labour not for harvesting, but to cut stalks left in the field after machines have harvested. Here too, in the case of wheat, the field may be burned rather than stalks being manually cut. There is machine which is attached to a tractor and separates the chaf from the grain. Some people hire this at the time of wheat harvest at the rate of three hundred and fifty rupees per hour. Though no one in this village owns this machine, some Sharmas in another village do.

Farming has become expensive, seeds and fertilizers cost more, then one also has to pay for hiring tractor. Overall, investment in farming has increased while employment availability has decreased. To meet the increased cost of farming, Parveen's household has borrowed from formal and informal sources. This year Parveen will again have to borrow from somewhere to meet the costs of cultivation.

Bonded labour or *bandhaks* existed previously. The petty capitalist Rajput household of the village use to have a *bandhak*. He was from another village. This *naukar* (servant) had to do all the work and he would be beaten up if he did not do it. However, a servant from own village was never beaten, only scolded. This was because if a servant from another village was beaten, he would at most runaway to his village, whereas, in the case of one from own village, there was always the possibility that he might complain to other villagers or even police. These servants were of

dusadh, chamar etc castes-those who were poor did it. Now, servants from the same village are kept because those from outside the village run away. Physical violence is no longer found in such instances and in fact, these servants are employed on a monthly salary of four to five hundred rupees, are given food and have to do all kinds of work.

The present era is different from earlier, there is fear of police in all. Rice and wheat are produced in every household, poverty has decreased from before. *Begari*, understood as working the whole day for food (and not forced labour under the guise of neo-bondage), was common until recently. If there were ten *zamindars* and twenty labour households, then but obviously the latter would have to do *begari*. *Begari* was done by Parveen's in-laws as well. Incidence of *begari* has also declined. Parveen herself might do this once in a while but not everyday because she has a family to feed and cannot afford to work without money routinely. Those who are poor, do *begari*, irrespective of caste. When I ask her why then was this denied by other castes, Parveen says that they lie because they are scared of what is being written and that I may complain to someone. She claims to have seen them working in others houses (this was not observed in the field). Parveen strongly asserts that irrespective of caste, all poor villagers do *majoori* i.e. wage labour. They would not admit this to me. It is fine if I tell Dusadhs that Guptas are working as labour, but if this is shared with other Guptas and upper-castes, it is a matter of dishonour and humiliation.

Parveen's father-in-law and his younger brother together owned ten *katha* i.e. five *katha* each. At some point, the latter transferred the former's share in his name. Parveen's mother-in-law used to live with her parents because she had no brothers and on their death, she inherited their land. This was sold and with the money, the in-laws bought back nine *katha* land. When land consolidation took place in the village, this land was given to the present pradhan and Parveen's family given the same amount of land nearby. Later, the government dug a canal which included some part of this land. No compensation was paid for it. Today, Reshama's household owns five *katha* land and has leased in ten *katha* land. According to her, decreased landsize meant they could not produce enough to eat and therefore leased in land.

Parveen got up at three in the morning today to work in her field and so that she could work with me during the day. Her field has not yet been sown and *badka babu* (literally meaning eldest son, it refers to the eldest son of the petty capitalist Rajput household in the village who is responsible for agriculture; is the largest landowner and employer in the village and with whom Parveen's household is in neobondage with) insists that it can be sown after his has been. Few days ago, Parveen's husband returned from Chandigarh where he worked for a contractor from the village. The work involved preparing animal feed. The contractor owed him four thousand rupees which another villager was supposed to bring with him. The contractor gave this man only eleven hundred rupees as Parveen's husband had fought with the contractor and left work. According to the contractor, it was Parveen's husband's fault. Now, the contractor's wife fights with Parveen and verbally abuses her. Since his return, Parveen's husband has been complaining of chest pains.

Today, he has gone to harvest sugarcane for which he will get fifty rupees per day. But it will be received many days after the completion of the work and not at the end of each work day. Parveen herself has not received wages yet for the weeding work she did more than two weeks ago for the same family. Today she has not gone for sugarcane harvest (removing the leaves, while male labour cuts the stalk) because her husband told her to do housework while he went for wage labour. He does not let Parveen undertake wage labour outside the village. The husband, Ram Avtar, will not work for the above mentioned contractor anymore. If they earn, they will eat. It is her 'guardian's' (husband's) fault that he fought with the contractor and returned home. Parveen says that '*santosh kar liya*' i.e. she has reconciled herself to this. On being prompted that why do they not demand the money which is their right, her reply is '*to ka ki, kauno ladai ki jayeke kya?*' i.e. so what to do, go and fight? In the absence of her husband, Parveen and her children do most of their own agricultural work. She may take the advice of villagers on issues like how much fertilizer will be required. Even now that her husband has returned he does not participate in own agricultural work due to ill-health.

Parveen's in-laws had mortgaged their land and incurred a debt of four thousand rupees for their son's marriage. Post marriage, there was not enough food to feed everyone in the house. Since they could not grow anything on the mortgaged land,

everything had to be bought. The creditor, who was from another village, cultivated the land, made all investments and kept the entire produce. Over the years, the in-laws kept on borrowing from the same creditor for day to day expenses. Parveen's in-laws have been dead for about fifteen years now. Parveen elaborates that no interest was charged on these borrowings, as the land had been mortgaged. If land is not mortgaged, then an interest ranging between rupees five and ten on every hundred rupees is charged per month.

Last year, her husband went with *badka babu* and incurred a debt of eighteen thousand and five hundred rupees from a public bank ostensibly for buying livestock. Of this, thirteen thousand and five hundred rupees was used to pay off the mortgage against the land. Parveen has paid an interest of two thousand rupees on the bank loan once and now they have received a notice from the bank asking them for dues amounting to about seven thousand rupees. Her family does not have this money and has asked *badka babu* to lend them the required amount. The latter keeps procrastinating that he will lend them the money after his work is done. In addition to helping them secure this loan, *badka babu* has also bought Parveen's family tin sheets for her hut's roof, allowed her to cut some bamboo from his field for repairs to her hut, lets her use his machine to cut grass for livestock etc. It is implicitly understood that some time in the future, Parveen has to pay for these. She also has borrowed money directly from them. Her family's history with *badka babu's* family and all this has meant that they owe a lot to the latter.

From a neighbouring village *bhumihar*, she had borrowed four hundred rupees about three or four years ago, to buy pesticide for wheat. She pays an interest of five rupees on every hundred rupees per month. They have not been able to save enough money to pay off this debt. Neither does the creditor demand its repayment, nor does he call upon Parveen or her family to provide unpaid labour services. Parveen says that he has nothing to loose, he is accumulating interest and will one day get his money back. [If wages are not received on time and there are no regular remittances, how are day to day expenses met?] Parveen says that they survive on their produce as long as it lasts. They also regularly buy things from the *kirana* shop (general store) on credit for which no interest is charged. They usually end up owing approximately two hundred rupees a month to the shop owner. When she will get work, then Parveen will pay off

these debts. The school fees of her children have not been paid for the past three or four months. The children frequently skip school to avoid the teachers' scolding for non-payment of fees. The 'master' also does not teach because consequently he does not get paid on time. On why she does not borrow to pay the school fees as well, her response is that incurring debt is not easy and it takes time. Employers other than *badka babu*, pay relatively on time.

Parveen provides unpaid labour services like washing, cleaning and drying grain and tending to the livestock to *badka babu's* household. She does this because the latter helps out in times of need. Not all credit-debt relations involve unpaid labour services and creditors are concerned only with money. Parveen gets called by *badka babu's* household because she lives very close to them and because when need be, she would not call upon a prospective creditor who lives far away. Despite the fact that Parveen and her family provide a lot of wage labour and non-wage labour services to *badka babu's* family, the latter never offers to plough their field with his tractor without money. Money is not asked openly but it is very subtly expressed through procrastination. Once he took two hundred rupees to plough the land leased in by her, but he never ploughs the land owned by Parveen's family. During the course of this session, Parveen time and again emphasises that she and her husband do so much work this family, but *badka babu* does not plough their field with his tractor. Once when there was nothing to eat in her house, she had gone to their house and asked for one kilo of flour, but she was told that they did not have flour.

The next day she asked *badka babu's* wife for five hundred rupees to buy fertilizer which has just come in stock in the public outlet. [*badka babu's* family is my host and this took place in front of me.] The wife consulted with her mother-in-law and then told Parveen that they did not have cash in the house because yesterday they had to give two hundred rupees to labourers. [After Parveen left, the daughter-in-law remarked that labour works this much and wants this much (gesticulating with her hands), '*maang maang kar* (by repeatedly and consistently asking/borrowing). Her mother-in-law explains to me that every other house in the villages is indebted. Several have borrowed from them and when they are asked to return the money, '*to bahut taav se kehte hain ki jab hoga tab de de denge*' i.e. angrily say that they will return the money when they have it. Two debtors have even filed suits against them.

They have paper-work to prove the debt (stamp papers on which the debtor has put his thumb impression) but paperwork has no value here.] The mother-in-law justifies that though Parveen seeks to borrow money from them, she works for others just because they pay slightly higher wages. This is how low-castes always behave, one may do a lot for them, but they never trust them. Low-castes have no respect and now that migration is significant, it is difficult to get labour locally. These are the ways of the village.

Later on, an outraged and hurt Parveen says that there is no benefit of her delivery priority and unpaid labour services to this household. Now she will have to ask others for money. If she does not purchase fertilizer soon, it will be out of stock and she will have to buy it from the black market for a much higher price. She expresses hope that her husband, who is today unloading truckfull of fertilizer sacks at the public outlet, will make some money (one reason why they are angry with her is that her husband did not go for work in their field today). She argues that when the government gives hundred rupees wage per day and here people give only fifty rupees, then labour will migrate out for work. Food costs so much and how much can one get in fifty rupees. She bears all this only because *badka babu* had helped them get a loan from the bank. They do not know the details of the loan as all formalities were done by *badka babu*. Parveen says she will sell her cow and give the money to them so that they can pay the bank. '*Amma (badka babu's mother) ki baatein kaleje par teer ki tarah laage*' i.e. (she is extremely hurt and saddened by what they did).

[In tears], Parveen says that she is a labourer and because of them she was declined of wage labour opportunities by the *pradhan* who told her never to come to his place and he would never give her any work, public or his own. Parveen wishes that only if her husband would migrate for longer periods of time, they would be able to earn more and save. But he only migrates for two to three months at a time and says he cannot do the work involved. [She also asks me to pay her periodically rather than daily in which case money is almost always used up in daily expenses. In between, we were joined by another woman whose husband works as a vegetable vendor in Chandigarh and Parveen enquired about the possibility of Ram Avtar getting a job there. The lady tells Parveen that it would be difficult as Ram Avtar would have to first go there,

connect with and establish relations with relevant people and ask the appropriate authority if he could get a space to sell vegetables in the '*mandi*' i.e. market].

However, after some time has passed, Parveen elaborates that because she often does unpaid labour for this *bhumihar* family, they do not charge her interest if she borrows anything (small amounts to meet some immediate expense) from them or charge a very low interest. This is despite the fact that she has not mortgaged her land with them. Otherwise, usually, if the land is not mortgaged, then the creditors charge some interest. There are other families (of Dhobi caste) who are in debt of this family but they pay an interest on the debt amount and do not provide unpaid labour services. As long as she is in debt of *badka babu's* family, whenever she gets called for wage labour from other employers, she needs to first ask the female head of the household if she can go or if they need her to do some work. It is implicit that she cannot work in those households which are not on good terms with *badka babu's* family. Even if they do not need her labour, they do not like Parveen working for others.

She constantly feels under '*dabaav*' i.e. duress, pressure because of her family's debt. This is one important reason why she wants her husband to migrate for employment. Even though remittances are irregular, they are nonetheless helpful-they can be used to pay off some debt, to buy some grains in bulk etc. This despite the fact that in the absence of her husband, she faces a lot of problems and has to work very hard to do all own agricultural work herself. Ram Avatar tells Parveen how to spend the remittances, whether and how much should be used in cultivation, to pay old debts, to buy food and other household things. Since they anyways have to pay for ploughing and if it was upto Parveen, she would have hired another tractor to do the job. However, her husband insists that they *badka babu* only because otherwise he would get angry. [Ultimately they had to hire a tractor from another village to plough their field. On this too *badka babu* got angry and asked them if they had worked for him, he would have ploughed their fields. Subsequently, he did plough Parveen's land and the land leased in by her. He charged them about four hundred rupees and this was more than what they had to previously pay for the tractor they had hired. Parveen's husband has been harvesting sugarcane in *badka babu's* fields for the past few days. Unlike other labourers who get paid once in four-five days according to the rate of sixty

rupees per day, he does not get paid anything. He will not be paid till the time that the ploughing charges have been adjusted against his labour.].

A prospective employer calls upon any one labourer, gives details about the work to be done and asks the labourer to recruit other labourers as required and come for work the next day. The same day, this labourer then contacts neighbours or others living nearby, those willing to work and not procrastinate, would accept the said wage and those who are capable of doing the work required. If these are unwilling to work because of reasons like low wage or own work pressure, the labourer might call upon others in the village. At times, employers like *badka babu* may personally and individually call upon labour. In the former case, the lead labourer is responsible for ensuring that wages are paid to others and in cases where the payment is much delayed, the lead labourer may have to pay from her pocket. A little over three weeks ago, *badka babu*, had asked Parveen to get few labourers together to weed his mustard field. Since she was the lead labour in this case, other labourers approached her after a couple of weeks when they still had not received wages. These labourers questioned Parveen on when they will get wages and then asked her to accompany them to *badka babu's* house to ask for wages because they feel shy and because she had taken them for that work.

In the case of brick kiln work, the '*chimneywallas*' owners/managers of kilns come to the village in jeeps to recruit labour. They come two to three months before the start of dry season and give some advance (about thousand rupees) to labourers willing to do such work. Advance is given to ensure that the labourer does not go to other kilns, as demand for labour is high during seasons. Only men work in brick kilns. Parveen has always been engaged in agricultural wage labour only. She does not work in kiln because of '*sharm*' and because other villagers would pass degrading inflammatory comments like '*aadmi ke peeche ghoom ghoom kaam kari*' i.e. she roams everywhere for work behind her husband's back. Even if her husband was in the village, she would not work in the kilns. She does not know how to make bricks. Will she be able to do such work?

A typical work day starts at 8am. Labourers work in the field till 12 noon when they get a one hour break. Depending on proximity, during this break, labour might go

home to eat, tend to other domestic chores and rest. Labour then return to the field around 1pm and work till about 5pm. It is not true that labourers go late for work and have to be called several times before they actually show up for work. Even if the work day starts late, labourers finish late. The employers should reflect on the fact that if they do not pay on time and if they pay less, then labourers would not like to work for them. If employers would feel for the fact that these people do not have food and pay on time, labourers would report for work in the first instance only.

Earlier, if labour would be given one rupee also, he would go running to work in the fields, but not so now. If they are not paid a certain amount, labour would rather not go for work and sit at home. Those who have even a little more money refuse to work for a paltry amount. The worst off are ready to work for even less because very few other options are available. In mornings, when labourers report in the field for work, they alongwith the lead labourer, they try haggling with the employer over wages, saying that everything has become so expensive. They ask for a small increase of about five rupees or so. Irrespective of the result, they finish the work. In practice, most employers with the exception of *badka babu* agree to a nominal increase. *Badka babu* is known to going back on his words-in the past he has been known to have agreed to a token increase in principle, but paying the old amount only at the completion of work. Labourers do not put up a fight in such cases as it would be a moot point when work has already been done. Not only his he the biggest landowner in the village, but his fields are situated very near to the main part of the village and easily accessible to labourers who take their animals there for grazing. This is also why they accept lower wages from him. Nonetheless labourers continue to work for him because otherwise he does not allow them to take their animals for grazing in his fields and '*khisyaat*' (irritated and angry). Parveen's son (around fourteen years old) had done some ploughing for a dhobi employer from another village and he was paid only twenty rupees whereas the going wage rate is fifty rupees. Her husband later went with this wage to fight with the employer as to why less was paid.

Labour from other villages is paid at a rate slightly more than the going local rate because it does not take its animals to the field of these *bhumihars* for grazing. They are paid on time, are provided with something to eat and may even be given old

clothes. Women do not work outside own village because of '*sharm*' (shyness, family honour).

Even if *bhuimhars* pay less, she would work first for them because they are major sources of employers and are the *badkas* (i.e. term used to indicate upper-caste and upper-class status) of the village. At the same time, she also claims that if Ahir or *chutka* (term used to indicate the lower-caste and class status) employers offer more wage, she would rather work for them first. [In reality, this was not observed and in fact, Parveen herself has contradicted this time and again].

Few years ago, when Parveen had asked for wage increase, she was told by the employers that in future she need not come to their *khet* (field) for *majoori* (wage labour), nor should she take her animals in their fields for grazing. They could manage without her labour services. Parveen justifies that increased food costs had prompted her to ask for increase in wages, '*maangi na, kamai na, to khai ka?*' i.e. 'if I do not ask, if I do not earn, then what will I eat?' Labourers have never entered into open confrontation with employers (irrespective of their caste position) over a demand for wage hike. At the beginning of a season, any one labourer might take an initiative on demanding a wage rise. She shares her thoughts with other villagers/friends/neighbours/labourers who work with her and together they decide what the demand should be and spread by word of mouth that from the next day they would go for work only if this amount of wage is paid. Nonetheless, there might be some sly labourers who would be willing to work for the old wages. Employers may resort to calling upon labourers from other villages, like *mosahars* from the neighbouring village. After few days, the employers would again call upon local labour and the latter return to work (irrespective of the result of their demand) because of fear and helplessness. Ahirs and lower caste employers might increase the wage after some time, but the *badkas* would be reluctant to do so because they have more land than anyone else and would have to pay labour much more on the whole. She feels that female labour should be paid at least thirty rupees per day and male labour hundred rupees.

Wage rates are determined depending upon the amount of physical labour involved in specific tasks. Cutting sugarcane leaves doe not involve much work and therefore it is

paid at only fifteen rupees per day. Sowing involves, preparing seeds, making bundles of stalks and then sowing these. Therefore, sowing is paid at thirty rupees.

[In the course of this interview session, an old woman had joined us who, with reference to me, remarked, '*yeh phir aa gayi angrezi jhaadne*' (I have come yet again to talk about things or in a language they do not understand). Following this some argument ensued between Parveen and her and the old woman leaves after few minutes. Parveen explains that the old lady is jealous of her because she has a regular and high paid job. Parveen worked with me in the field for fifty rupees per day.]

Employers are present on the field to constantly supervise the labour.

There is a lot of fighting among labouring households, among her caste people-over issues like animals straying in others fields and causing some damage, between their children when parents are at work, within families over some member not working or doing domestic chores, if the field boundary is crossed by mistake during ploughing and in this people are known to have even field complaints with the police and so on. If she has fought with an employer, she does not work for him as long as she is angry. But then '*gaon mein rahi to laachar hoi to jaayeke padi*' i.e. but since she lives in the village, she is helpless and obligated to work for them. [Another woman who has joined us remarks that lower-castes should stick together but they work for different upper-caste/class employers who force them into acting against each other]. It is difficult for labourers to be united-some would work for some *badkas* even if they were told not to because they are threatened by *badkas* that their livestock would be harmed if it entered their fields, some labour would agree to work for lower wages etc. *Badkas* do not fight amongst themselves and even if they do, no one comes to know, unlike in the case of *chutkas* who are loud, brash and the entire village comes to know of it. *Badkas* possess '*buddhi*' (implying knowledge and intelligence).

The present pradhan is an Ahir woman, but in reality all powers are exercised by her husband who is the pradhan of the village for all practical purposes. Parveen does not know the party affiliation of the pradhan. Resham tells how the present pradhan does not take the hundred rupees per day wage of one who has worked in a MGNREGA job. Instead, he goes with them to the bank once in five or six months. He gets the

villagers to withdraw all the unemployment benefit and he takes this money from them. It could even be between seven thousand to eight thousand rupees. The pradhan gives a token amount to the account holder/beneficiary to buy alcohol. The bank personnel also side with the pradhan. According to Parveen, what is needed is Mayawati scoldin these culprits and also instituing enquiries. But then, Resham acknowledged that Mayawati too is under pressure from the *badkas*. On comparison between the present pradhan and the previous Dhobi pradhan, she is of the view that '*garib ka kauno saath nahi deb, aur khud ko kha se kha bana liya? Kauno sirf aapan ghar ke saath jeet jaat hai ka? Na*' (No one supports or sticks with the poor. They act in self-interest and have made so much of and for themselves. Does anyone win only with the support of their household? No.) During election campaigns they promise much, but after winning nothing comes of it. Pradhans work to benefit themselves only. They further the interests of their '*khaas aadmi*' (their favourites/lobbies/loyalists) by giving them IAY money or job cards. These '*khaas aadmi*' are of different castes. Even a dusadh pradhan would not be good for labour because he would operate under the influence of village *badkas*.

A Muslim '*sarkari*' (public) bus driver operates as a point man and '*ek gaon ka vote dilane ka theka*' is taken by him (he takes a contract to ensure that one village votes for the concerned party). He takes money, consumes a lot of alcohol and tells all villagers to vote for Mayawati. Mayawati is a '*harijan*' and during elections people say to vote for her because of her caste. A '*harijan*' or non-*harijan*' government makes no difference for '*harijans*'. '*Mehngayi aur bad gayi hai*' (things have become all the more expensive).

A benefit of Mayawati has been that inter-caste fights have decreased significantly. Now upper castes are scared to get into fights with '*harijans*'. '*Harijans*' can easily get their reports filed at police stations. Earlier an upper-caste person would go to the police station even if the goat of a lower-caste person dared to enter his fields. Now '*harijans*' feel '*surakshit*' (safe). Action is taken on complaints and reports almost immediately. For instance, last year, Parveen had thirteen thousand and five hundred rupees in the house following the sale of a cow. This money was stolen and she was suspicious of one person. She filed a complaint with the police who came to the village and took the accused (an Ahir) to the police station. The accused was beaten

up by the police. He claimed to be wrongly accused. Either to escape the police or if he was the actual culprit, he returned seven thousand rupees. There are other cases also where '*harijans*' have filed complaints with the police and the latter have acted on these by coming to the village, taking the accused to the station and beating or scolding them. They are also known to file false cases against others (irrespective of caste), '*faasne ke liye*' i.e. on petty fights or just for the sake of it. Even upper-castes do this.

Under Mayawati's government, labourers can now get work under MGNREGA. However, very few labouring households possess job cards, only few days of work are given and in this also the *pradhan* favours his closed circle. The *pradhan* does not give her any work because he is angry with her. When Parveen had asked him for IAY, she was asked to 'pay' five thousand rupees. Under pressure from *badka babu's* family, she told this at a government enquiry held in the village. She had not wanted to do this, but was coerced into doing it. Before this, the *pradhan* used to provide her with wage labour in his fields, but now, he does not employ her at all. There is an old rivalry between the households of *badka babu* and the *pradhan*. Not only do they not talk with each other, but also avoid going down their lanes. Both incite and encourage villagers to fight with the other. Villagers do not benefit from this. When Parveen had told *badka babu* that she does not want to complain because it would mean the loss of work opportunities, she was reassured by *badka babu* that he would give her work and any other shortfalls would be met from his house. '*Jaun ab dekhi tamasha*' and now see the drama [Referring to their refusal to extend her credit to purchase fertilizer, non-payment or late payment of wages etc. During the course of this fieldwork, Parveen had been employed by them to tend to their livestock for five hundred rupees per month and two meals a day which were served late and she would often be given stale food. At the end of two months or so she had not received her wages and she told me that in the end they would 'adjust' her wages against her debt].

In the village there used to be a SHG run by a Gupta man. However, it lasted only about a year. The organiser said that he could not manage, could not go to the bank every day etc and he returned all members' money. The group comprised ten members (five men and five women members). The majority of members were low-castes, though there were Ahirs as well. No member was of upper-caste. Its members would

contribute twenty rupees a month which was deposited in a bank by the organiser. They would meet monthly at the village's public school. At these meetings the members would discuss how the group should function consensually. The SHG had received some financial aid from the government. Small amounts of loan were given to members at very low interest rates. When the organiser did not want to continue, none of the other SHG members came forward to take over because they were all busy in own work. Besides, they were all illiterate and therefore could not do bank transactions or make sense of other financial matters.

4.2. Phoolwati (Dhobi)

Phoolwati (fondly called *pradhan* i.e. female equivalent of *pradhan* because of her 'activism') was married into this village, though she is now settled in another village by the name of Gagalva. Phoolwati's husband and two brother-in-laws together owned about ten *katha* land. Though formally the title is not in their names, the land is cultivated in three equal and separate shares. Families of both brother-in-laws cultivate an equal share of this land. Phoolwati's share is not cultivated by her family because they shifted to another village many years ago. She has given her share to a son of a sister-in-law (who gave all her land to her eldest son) to sow and eat. She does not invest in it and does not get any part of the produce. Phoolwati says that she will not transfer the title because then no one would ask for her and she comes often to visit 'her' land and is treated well by the families of her brother-in-laws (possibly so that she would not ask for her share).

According to Phoolwati, originally, their family owned more than ten *kathas* but they lost land when land consolidation had taken place. She does not know the details because she was a newly-wed then and stayed indoors. It was only much later, as she starting moving out of the house that she came to know of this. She says that when the *lekhpal* (revenue clerks responsible for land records) had visited the village, their land was take away and given to upper-castes. Lower-castes did not enough money to bribe officials as the upper-castes did to get the best lands. But now if something like this were to happen, she would go to courts and demand to see all the papers.

Several decades ago, Phoolwati and her husband went to work for a big dhobi landowner in Gagalva. They used to do all kinds of work for him ranging from

agricultural work, massaging, washing his clothes etc. They worked for him for many years and in view of this, about a month or so before his death, he transferred approximately one *beegha* land in Phoolwati's husband's name. A part of this was lost when land consolidation took place. This was land was not of as good quality, the yied would be infected, less could be produced and during rains it can be flooded. Some more of this land was lost as the government appropriated part of it to dig a canal and due to encroachment by upper-castes. In the former case, Phoolwati had received some compensation by the government. Phoolwati's land was encroached by the neighbouring Brahmins. These Brahmins sold some of the encroached land and used some in house construction. Neither could she complain, nor did she have the money to fight them. Her family pleaded and appealed to their reason but these Brahmins threatened her with beating and reporting to the police. Once her sons were also arrested and she had to 'pay' some villagers to act as her sons' witnesses and she had to pay some amount at the police station after which her sons were released.

About four years previously she 'bought' back the encroached two *kathas* of land for eighty thousand rupees. About forty thousand rupees were raised by her sons and the remaining was borrowed from a carpenter of own village by mortgaging their land. This way they did not have to pay any interest. The Brahmins had shown her papers which attested to the fact that she did not own them in the first place. Phoolwati and her family are illiterate and no one in the village dared to speak up in favour of them because they feared physical violence and police. One year later they were able to clear the debt with the carpenter and land was returned to them. At present she has about twelve *katha* land and it is not mortgaged. However, since the last three years, she has leased out a part of this land. She does not make any investments on this plot but may tell the lessee what to grow and she takes half the produce.

Phoolwati has three sons. One is in the army, one works as a dhobi and also migrates at times and the third son is a migrant labour. She elaborates that to secure her son a position in the army, she had to bribe someone. To meet this expense she had mortgaged her land and later when the son had earned enough money, they cleared the debt.

Before his death, her husband had told her that if their sons and daughter-in-laws do not provide for her, then she should move back to Sapahi Khas. Whenever there has been a domestic fight, Phoolwati comes to live with her relatives in Sapahi Khas for few days and returns when things are back to normal. Her sons give all their earnings to their wives and the daughter-in-laws fight with her all the time and do not respect her. She and her husband spent whatever they had on their sons' education and weddings and had expected that they would support them in old age. Phoolwati cries while speaking of her sons' drinking and beating their wives and even her, the constant taunts that she is subjected to because she is old and cannot earn anymore. She wishfully expresses that if she had been given IAY money, then she would have built herself a house in Sapahi Khas. Her sons lead separate socio-economic lives and Phoolwati eats with either of them.

Decades ago, when Phoolwati was very young, her father-in-law had borrowed money from the Rajput family in Sapahi Khas village (grandfather of *badka babu*). In return, he sent his elder son (Phoolwati's elder brother-in-law) to work for the family. He did agricultural and related tasks, as well as other households jobs. He was often on the receiving end of threats and actual physical violence. Some times he would run away and come to home for a couple of days. Much later, when the younger sons of the family started migrating and could save some money, the debt was paid off and the elder son was 'freed'. The Rajput family had also given them a small plot of land to cultivate but because by that time, the elder son would often complain of ill-health and could not cultivate this land, it was taken back. Now *badkas* do not keep bonded labourers. '*Yug, zamaana badal gaya hai*', times have changed. Labourers can refuse to work for *bhumihars*.

Brick kilns came up near Gagalva about five or six years ago. Incoming migrant labour from Ranchi works there, including female labour. The latter drape saris differently, carry very young children on their backs and the slightly older ones also work, they make and drink a local version of alcohol. From Gagalva, men work at these kilns. They are primarily engaged in moulding bricks or they own donkeys or bullock carts used to carry brick loads. At the start of a season, the '*chimneywallahs*' (manager/owners of brick kiln) come to the village in a car and tell those who had taken advance from them to start coming for work, they also ask those who own

donkeys and bullock carts. They also retain a record of those who had previously worked for them or had borrowed money from, who are called for work when the season starts. Several young women learn stitching in a nearby village and after acquiring these skills they can stitch from their homes and earn. Male labourers migrate, some even go abroad. In the latter case, it is observed that some initially had to mortgage land to raise enough money to pay the agents for passport, visa and other related expenses.

Due to mechanisation, the demand for agricultural labour has decreased. Men have started migrating out. Those who are educated and have good jobs take their wives also with them. But otherwise women do not migrate. Rural women do agricultural wage labour and live on that. Though farming has become more expensive, now the yield is more than what it used to be previously. Villagers borrow money to buy seeds, fertilizers etc. However, unlike in Sapahi Khas, agricultural wage labour is paid comparatively on time.

When she was young, Phoolwati undertook agricultural wage labour. She was involved in weeding, sowing, harvesting, threshing. For wage labour, Phoolwati also travelled to other villages, but always in groups of women. At that time, she would earn only a rupee or two in agriculture and over the years this was increased to five rupees and then ten rupees. But mostly, labour was then paid in kind with grains. Then even if she would take two rupees to the market, she could buy many things. Now even with four hundred rupees, a much less number of things can be bought. She also worked as a *dhobi* (washerman). She and her daughter would collect clothes from own and neighbouring villages to wash and iron. At that time, they were not paid in cash but in kind, in the form of grains. Now people wash clothes themselves, have machines, only those houses give clothes to *dhobi* where there has been a death in the family.

Employers, from own village or outside, may either personally call upon labour individually or ask one labourer to bring several labourers for a specific work, for a specified wage. Some face to face haggling takes place. If the employer is from another village then, labour demands a slightly higher wage because it has travel a

greater distance and also in times of crisis they cannot depend on these employers for food. Employers stay at the field to supervise the labour.

In Gagalva, the lower-castes are numerically dominant and there are only five or six Brahmin families. Nonetheless, the former are scared of the latter because they are educated and have money and power. The lower-castes don't even have enough to eat. Now the *badkas* do not even allow livestock of lower-castes to graze in their field because investment in agriculture has increased and so has the produce.

Villagers do not deliver unpaid labour services to creditors if they have mortgaged land or are paying an interest. Only in those cases does Phoolwati provide unpaid labour services where she shares strong social ties. Only *badkas* call upon *chutkas* for *begari* (term used to mean unpaid labour).

The pradhan of Gagalva village is a woman and she belongs to *badhai* (carpenter) caste. She only signs on papers. In reality it is her husband who moves about in the village, conducts panchayat meetings and intervenes in fights among villagers.

In Gagalva, villagers have to pay five thousand rupees to the pradhan to avail of IAY. At the beginning of the present pradhan's tenure (almost five year ago), two of her sons had each paid this amount but so far they have not received any money. Whenever Phoolwati asks the pradhan about it, she is told that '*tumhara kaagaz neeche ho gaya hai*' i.e. there are many application before hers. But Phoolwati reasons that '*us aadmi jisne hamare saath diya tha uska to ghar ban gaya, to kya uska kaagaz upar ho gaya aur hamara neeche, aur neeche ho bhi gaya to paanch saal mein upar nahi aaya?*' i.e. the houses of those who had applied with us have even been constructed, was their application not moved down under the load of prior applications and even if ours moved down in the line, how come in almost five years out turn never came? Phoolwati had borrowed five thousand rupees from a pandit in her village to pay the pradhan for IAY. Till the debt was cleared, they had to pay an interest of five rupees on every hundred rupees per month. If they are not paid the IAY money during the tenure of the serving pradhan, they would have to pay money again to the next pradhan. When Phoolwati gives this logic to the present pradhan, he says '*halla kyun kar rahi ho, tumhara bhi hoga*', 'why are you shouting, yours will

also be done.’ Even if the pradhan was to be from a lower-caste no benefit would accrue to labourers.

Only once were the labourers employed under the MGNREGA scheme, when a road was being constructed in the village. Job cards of the majority are retained by the pradhan. The rich possess red ration cards (meant for the poorest of the poor to procure sugar, rice and kerosene oil from government fair shops under subsidised prices). Half the poor people in the village have been given white ration cards under which even if one gets kerosene oil, it is more expensive (in comparison to red ration card holders).

There is no benefit under Mayawati’s government. Phoolwati has not received IAY. The only benefit of Mayawati’s government has been that wages have increased to hundred rupees (reference to MGNREGA and not actual prevailing wages in the village). Mayawati has joined ranks with upper-castes, *‘jo who log kahte hain, vahi woh karti hain’*, she does as instructed by the upper-castes. *‘log kehte hain ki Mayawati Ahir, Chamar, Dhobi ko janti hain, kaise janti hain? Ab usko gira denge’*, i.e. ‘people say that Mayawati supports Ahirs, Chamars and Dhobis, but how? This time we will bring down her government.’ Phoolwati has not received her old age/widow pension this year and asserts that if she does not get it, she will go to Padrauna (district headquarters).

Phoolwati recites an incident from about two years ago. A bhumihar called a young boy for some farming related work. When the latter queried about the wages, the bhumihar lost his temper, started shouting and verbally abusing him for how dare he ask about wages when the boys’s animals graze in his fields. The boy went inside his hut and closed the door, while the bhumihar kept ranting. When the boy’s parents returned from wage labour, they came to know of this incident from other villagers and they then went to the bhumihar’s place to seek an explanation. The bhumihar did not take this well and when the parents showed up at his place, he took off his footwear and pointing it at the boy’s parents, shouted that how dared they come to his house, he will beat them so much (with the footwear) that their faces will swell. The parents also retaliated by taking off their footwear and threatened the bhumihar.

Though there was no physical violence, heated words and abuses were exchanged, thereafter, the boy's parents returned to their home.

After this incident, all village labourers decided that they will not work for any bhumihars of the village. The standoff lasted for few days. After few days, the bhumihar who had abused the boy, came to the part of the village where labourers lived. Though he did not apologise, he met several villagers. The villagers then decided to let go of the issue and agreed that if he paid wages then labourers could work for him. Phoolwati asserts that if the bhumihar had not come to them, they would have taken matters further by reporting the incident at the police station. '*Ab bhumihar dabta hai*', now the hands of bhumihars are forced. Also, the villagers thought that if they do not take a stand now, in future their children might be at the receiving end of bhumihars wrath.

In another incident, about three months ago, when ration meant to be distributed under the PDS came to the village, it was distributed to the rich of the village at night. When some villagers came to know of this, they informed Phoolwati. She and the others decided to assemble at one place, go to Tumkuhi (block) and register a complaint with the SDM (sub-district magistrate). After consulting with each other, they approached a former Ahir pradhan and asked him to write a letter to this effect and to personally call the SDM who is more likely to listen to him. The next day, they gave this application to the SDM at the block who send someone the following day to enquire about the matter. Various villagers showed him their ration cards. When asked as to who had made these cards, the pradhan meekly replied '*sahab, yeh pehle ke hain*', i.e. 'these are from before'. Since ration worth twenty thousand rupees had been diverted, the same amount of penalty was imposed by the officer on the culprit. The officer told the pradhan and the person responsible for giving the ration to the rich that '*aap log galat kaam karke gaon mein jhagda lagate hain*' i.e. 'you all engage in illegal activities which lead to fights in the village.' He also told the assembled villagers that their pradhan is a cheat, which made them laugh.

4.3. Bela (Dhobi)

Bela never went to school as she was needed to work in the fields. Parveen concurs that she was studying in class one or two when her family withdrew her from school as she was required to work in the fields.

Decades ago, the main settlement of the village was located in a different place and shifted to where it is now when the government allocated '*patte ki zameen*' to '*harijans*'. This land was part of the fields of lower-castes like Dhobis and Dusadhs; Ahirs and not '*bhumihars*'. Depending upon family size, the allocated '*patte ki zameen*' would be about two to three decimal point. Some members of '*harijan*' households shifted to the new land, while some members continues to live on the '*pushtani*' (ancestral) land. Say, for example, one brother and his family would move out and the other brother and his family continued to live there. Some not as poor as '*harijans*', also benefitted. They were able to bribe the '*lekhpal*' and the *pradhan* to augment their land. Bela's house is built on '*patte ki zameen*'. This is what she has heard from others.

One benefit of land consolidation was that those who possessed small plots in different places, were given land in one location. However, some were allocated poorer quality or barren land at a lower price and obviously this is what the poor got. Bela and Parveen explain that the older generation i.e. their parents-in-law did not have money or the intellect to challenge this i.e. '*hooshiyaar na the, jo mil gaya, usme kha le aur chal de*'. Post land consolidation and the introduction of the canal, all have benefitted. The latter is cleaned by the government once in three years or so. '*Abhi usme kuda bhara hai. Jab nahar ka safai hot hai, uske gehara karta hai to aas-paas ke khet mein paani aa jata hai, par door ke khet mein boring, pumpset, pipe se kaam chalta hai*' (At present, the canal is full of rubbish and when it will be cleaned, it will be dug a little deeper. This provides water to the nearby fields. For fields much further, tube-well irrigation is used). Pumps are hired at the rate of hundred rupees per hour. Now people grow peas, lentils, rice, wheat, potatoes and get 'bumper' harvest. '*Varna pehle sukha pada rahta tha*' i.e. Otherwise everything would dry before.

Unlike the previous decades, now people produce enough to eat. Before land consolidation, people grew different crops and also wheat and rice but in much less quantities because of the lack of water. Since the introduction of canal, many people

have got boring done in their fields. Earlier people had to live on what they produced in their field, they would eat once a day and had to go hungry rest of the time. Then wages were paid in cash and kind. In return for doing wage labour in different villages, people would be given grains. '*anaj late the, peeste the, banate khate haali haali, phir jaat rahe phir kaam kare. Pehle khaane ka bada dukh tha. Ab khaaye bhar ka ho jaat hai, to koi aasani se jaata hain kaam karne?*' (Earlier when people got grains for wages, they would grind this, eat in a hurry and then go back to work. Earlier getting enough to eat was a big problem. Now that there is enough to eat, then would one go to work easily?). Then even the *badkas* did not produce as much as they do today, though it was more than what the poor could produce in their fields. '*Ab to jiska nahi uska bhi bhar jaata hai majoori kar ke, pehle se to bahtar hai*'. Now even those who do not own land, have enough to eat because they do other labour. Things are much better now.

Since more than twenty years, high yield variety seeds and fertilizer have been available in government stores.

Mechanisation was introduced about twenty years before. Though the present wages are higher than in the pre-mechanisation phase, then greater employment was available. Just by doing wage labour people could earn enough grains in a month to feed their families. Bela and Parveen chat that when I had first arrived in the village, the villagers were scared that *badka babu* who was my host had called me to incite the people against the *pradhan*, '*uski naukri khatam karne*' (to end his tenure) and therefore, villagers were scared to show me their ration cards.]

Male out-migration existed before the introduction of machines as well, but it has increased now. '*Puraan log kisani karte*' (The older generation was involved in agriculture). The younger population does not want to do farming. '*Hooshiyaar ho gaye, shaukeen ho gaye*' (they have become smart, more conscious, consumerist and fancy). Earlier people would not bathe for five or six days now if they do not bathe for two or three days, they are restless. Earlier people washed their hair with mud, now they want soap and shampoo. '*Ab lagta hain ghar par bethe se kauno dharm-karm chali? Ab ladka log thoda bahut pad gaya, bahar jaakar kamata, to saholiyat ho gayi sab cheez ki*' (Now one thinks that if one were to stay home, then how would the

household run? Now that the younger generation is more literate and migrates out, there is ease and greater convenience of everything). Remittances are important and used for everything. '*Apna ghar ka kaam mein, kheti ke kaam mein pareshani hoti hain*' (in the face of male-outmigration, it is difficult to manage household and agricultural work). '*Koi kodne ko, khaddar cheetne ko, beej cheetne ko nahi*' i.e. there is no one to do spade work, to spray fertilizer or drop seeds.

There have been several developments in the village labour market over the last twenty years or so. The village has oil extraction machine, flour mill, handpumps, photoshop, general store, goldsmith's shop, motorcycle and tractor repair shops, brick kilns, electricity and cell phone tower. Women have not benefitted from the opportunities presented by these new developments and sources of employment. At this point another woman who had joined us pointed out that in Kasiya block women worked for a bangle company and some were involved in washing empty alcohol bottles with surf (detergent) for which they were paid. Bela ponders that in '*dehat*' (rural area) village what other job can one get? When prodded that if available, would she undertake works like sweeping the road, carrying and dumping headloads of bricks, Bela says no because she would be self-conscious. Parveen says that these tasks can only be done by those who have a job card and in this village no woman has one. Bela says that the pradhan told her that women will not be able to do such work, but she reasons that if women from another village could come and work on the road being constructed in this village, then why would she not be able to do it? If children can do it and if women can sow fields for whole days, then why would they not be able to carry headloads of mud, even if they could do less amount of the work.

Bonded labour existed previously but not in recent decades. Parveen intervenes that nonetheless there are cases like her husband's who works the whole day for *badka babu*'s, but receives only sixty rupees or so. Bela elaborates that some labourers who work for one *badka* (*badka babu*) may not be able to work for another *badka* (pradhan), if the *badkas* are in conflict with one another. But then it depends on the concerned labour also. For example, she works for both, but Reshama does not work for the pradhan because of she is under debt based pressure from *badka babu*'s house and because she also complained against the pradhan. With the exception three or four households, all others work for *badka babu*. These three or four households are not

under pressure or in debt of the *pradhan*, but they are of the same caste as the *pradhan* i.e. Ahir. Bela further goes on to say that with the exception of two or three Ahir households, no Ahir household works for *badka babu*. In rare cases the children of these households may work for *badka babu*.

Earlier labour could not say no to their employers and would get very less wages. Now labourers can state that they will go work only if they a certain wage. But Bela's household is in a different position. Her father-in-law was a bonded labourer of *badka babu's* grandfather. '*Unka vyavhar hai*' i.e. it is a matter of social ties and association. When Bela is called upon by them for work, she does not negotiate or answer back to them and does whatever is asked of her. In the past, *badka babu* has helped her in times of need. For her daughter's delivery, he took them to a hospital in Faazilnagar block in his car and did not ask for any money. She also gets paid at the same rate as others when she does agricultural wage labour for *badka babu*.

Today also *Badka Babu* has a '*bandhak*' (meaning bonded labour but also used to imply unfree labour). An old man (more than sixty years old) works for him. Though he himself is not physically capable of undertaking agricultural work, he performs other kind of labour and odd jobs-tending to the livestock, cleaning the front courtyard, fetching tea from the house for labourers. He earns about five hundred rupees a month. He is also given his meals by them. When he goes home, he is given some token amount or even grains. According to Parveen, the old man had one got very angry that he was not given flour or new shoes and he left work and went home for about six months. Then *badka babu's* younger brother went to his place to placate and cajole him into coming back to work. He was given new shoes and was asked to have his meals at their house. *Badka babu* has leased out about two *katha* land to the old man. All the investment is made by the latter and the entire produce is kept by him. This is one reason why *Badka babu* is angry with him. The latter would think that he gives the old man so much, and he does not even get half the produce?

Unlike *bandhaks*, now people refuse to work without wages. '*Dusre ke ghar mein gobar pothne mein, chauka bartan karne mein shikayat hogi, laaj aat*' (dealing with cowdung and washing and cleaning dirty utensils in houses of others is a matter of shame, impropriety and is disapproved by the society). It is acceptable that one has

been hired to drive a tractor for a monthly wage, but not the former case. Only Kamkar and Gond caste groups washes dirty utensils in houses of others.

Bela's father-in-law's father had about thirty *katha* land which was equally divided among his four sons. Bela's father-in-law inherited about eight *katha* which was further sub-divided between his two sons. Bela's husband inherited four *katha* land. Bela's father-in-law's father had twelve *katha* land in the nearby village of Gurvaliya but this was sold by her father-in-law. The sale proceeds were divided among the families of the four brothers of the father-in-law's father and among the families of the four brothers of Bela's father-in-law.

Bela does not undertake non-agricultural wage labour. '*Town hota to na*' (Had it been a town, she could have undertaken non-agricultural wage labour). Earlier she use to work as a *dhobi* but rarely now because she does not have enough stamina, her children migrate and the pond is dry. She tells me that her husband does not allow her to go to other villages for wage labour, that she eats in what is available in the house or sleep with an empty stomach. She also feels shy in going to other villages for wage labour. However, Bela goes to neighbouring villages of Sapahi Bujurg and Sapahi Khurd to do weeding and sowing work. In such cases, she travels with a group of ten to fifteen women and may be a couple of young boys who have been recruited for the same job. Bela does not travel alone or in the company of men for wage labour in other villages for it would be indecent to do so. She would not like to work alone and also these tasks cannot be done by an individual alone. '*Akele jaayenge to log kahenge ki dekho apna akele ja kar apna kaam let, humka nahi le jaat, shikayat ho jaayegi agar akele jaayenge*' if she goes alone to another village for work, then people will taunt and accuse her that she goes alone to work and earn and does not take others with her and they will complain about it. This would not be a problem in own village because Bela's '*maalik*' (owner, here it is used to refer to her husband) would be present as well and even if her were not, she likes working in her village.

Bela occasionally works as a '*thekedar*' i.e. labour contractor. Her daughter Leelavati is also a contractor. Lata is the most dominant contractor. Female labour contractors only organise labour for agricultural tasks performed by women such as weeding and sowing. For all types of spade work, for instance, only male labour and male

contractors are approached. In cases where the labour demand is higher or one contractor is unable to recruit labour or does not have the time, different contractors with their respective groups of labourers may work together. A contractor unable to secure any work may herself join in the party of another.

A work day begins at 8am with a break at 12 noon and work again commences after about one hour and goes on till the evening. Wages may be paid in the evening at the end of the work day or some employers may tell the labourers to collect it the next or some other day. Wages may be given on the field or labour can collect it from his house in the evening.

The employers, mostly in cases where they are from another village, call at the contractor's place in the evening and inform them about the job to be done and the land area. They ask the contractors to organise labour and get the job done. Employers know whom to contact, because the same people have been working for them over the years. They also know that labour will listen to these contractors. In situations where the work to be done is relatively large-scale, different labour groups or parties may work together. *'Kabhi Kabhi Bela aur Lata pai to ek dusre ka muh nooch le'*, at times, things get so heated between contractors that Bela and Lata, that it seemed that they would even harm each other. When employers call upon Bela, she haggles with them over the wage rate and stipulates that only if they get so much money, tea and something to eat, will labour work for them. Higher wages are stated if the employer is from another village. *'Itna dur jayenge to kya kam paise mein, apne gaon ki dusri baat hai'* i.e. why will they go so far for less money and own village is a different matter. Bela may also discuss with other contractors about the wages, the work to be done and who to recruit for it. She then goes door to door to organise labourers for work the next day.

Local *bhumihars* and other caste employers as well recruit labour themselves. They usually call upon those labouring households that have been regularly working for them over the years. In the process of recruitment, she considers her caste people, relatives and neighbours, those who are more likely to listen and obey her and those who are fast workers. At the beginning of a season, once a party or group has been formed, it most likely does not change for the season and the same members work

with the Bela on other jobs as well. Parveen interjects that while this season she is in Bela's party, she will be in another's party next season. Labourers change parties every season because of some inevitable fight and tension between them and the contractor. Bela says that labour gets angry with her when she does not recruit them. She tries to rationalise with them that she can recruit only as many as are required by the job and if she were to take them all, then would they not have to come back empty-handed? If one contractor bags more jobs than others or does not consult the others at times, the latter are jealous and get angry with that contractor. According to Parveen, labour also gets angry with the contractors because they charge more money from the employers but they do not pay this amount to the labourers.

For example, when a contractor recruits labour and tells them that the employer will pay twenty rupees for the job, the labourers may decline and ask for twenty-five rupees and would ask the contractor to go back to the employer and negotiate. The contractor does this and then reports back that the employer has agreed. However, when wages are distributed by the contractor, it turns out that they are paid twenty rupees only. The contractor would defend herself that the employer paid only that much. A few labourers may then approach the employer and if they come to know that he had paid the contractor according to twenty-five rupees per labourer, the latter then fight with the contractor for the remaining amount and abuse her of cheating them. They would leave that contractor's party and join another's. But, at the same time, labour fears that the contractor would not call them for any work in future, particularly if it is a contractor that bags many jobs.

Where wage payment is much delayed, labourers approach the contractor who then goes to the employer and fights with him and threatens that if he does not pay, they will destroy the standing crop. A few months ago, an employer had approached **Bela** for weeding his field on daily wage basis. However, the labourers were not paid daily and after a couple of days, they deserted the work. *'Ab kya koi jayega us khet mein, laad maarne bhi nahi jaayenge. Ab kisse karaiye? Mosahar se? Dekhenge ge kha-kha se mosahar laayenge'* i.e. 'Now who will work in that field, no one will go there even to kick it. Now who will he get to do his work? Mosahars? Lets see from where all he is able to collect and get mosahars?' Labour needs the wages to be paid daily because it needs money for daily expenses like buying vegetables.

Where labour has been employed on daily wages, they try to draw out the work, possibly for a day or so, even though a contractor may keep hollering at them to hurry up. But if the employer provides an incentive, for example, if he is willing to pay more if labour does the work as soon as possible, then labour does not try to prolong the work. [Parveen whispers in my ear that I should not talk about this in *badka babu's* house]. Labour also thinks that when the demand is high, they should finish one job as soon as possible and move onto the next one.

The employer may or may not be present at the field for the whole day for purposes of supervision. A local employer is more likely to be on site, whereas, an outside employer is more likely to leave things in the hands of the contractor. Bela works alongside her group members and keeps hollering at them to work fast or else the employer will cut the money.

If an employer does not increase wages after negotiations and haggling, labour might refuse to go to work. But there is always the danger that others will go and do the work. '*do din ghar par bethenge, phir uske paas kaam par chale jaayenge, kahi aur kaam milega to vha chale jaayenge. Aur dehat, gaon mein kya karenge?*' Meaning, they will sit at home for two days and then return to work for the same employer or any where else where they might be employed because what else is there to do in the village?

Bela has never been in debt. She says that labourers do not approach her for loans.

Among lower-castes, exchange labour is the norm. However, in cases where households do not share close ties with others or do not have access to family labour, they may hire labour.

Fights are common among *chutkas* or her caste group. She had once fought with a family who use to give their clothes to her for washing. They then started giving clothes to another *dhobi* and Bela then fought with that *dhobi*. People fight on small issues like if one's animals stray into another's fields, if someone laughs at one etc. [Another woman present adds that such things happen in villages only and not in

cities]. There is no consensus and unity among the Dhobi caste or even among the poor. *'Hamara bhala nahi hoga, to tumhara bhala bhi nahi hoga. Chotti-chotti baat par tension, ladai, muh phula lete hain, to kha se sahanmati hogi?* (If we do not benefit, then another will also not benefit. There are fights and tension between households on petty issues and if people get angry on small issues then how will there be consensus?). Sometimes people live in harmony and agreement and sometimes they fight.

According to Bela, there is no difference among employers on the basis of caste. *'Badka se kabhi koi kaam fasa, koi jarorat padi, emergency hui, to badka madad karega, chhut kya karega? Koi sadhan ho to na, uske khet mein to majoori karo aur bas apne ghar chali aayi'* i.e. 'in case of any need or emergency, the *badkas* will help, but of what help can the *chutkas* be without the resources? In *chutkas* fields, one does wage labour and comes back home.' The older generation was scared of *badkas* but not now. Now the *badkas* may get irritated, but then they come around. *'Jab yaha rehna hai, to kya ghamand, badka babu khisyaat jaat hai, phir dwar par aate hain thode din baad'*, meaning, 'if one has to live in the village then what of arrogance, *badka babu* sometimes gets angry but then after few days comes to our doorstep.'

She believes that even if there was to a *pradhan* from her caste group, he would be no better. *'chhut jaat ka koi nahi puchta'* i.e. 'no one asks after the lower-castes'.

There have been limited benefits under the Mayawati government. School children get money (scholarships) and the poor are given a hearing in fights. Otherwise, there have been no benefits as such. Things have become very expensive. Now she will not win. If the poor are not given any help and support, the poor will not vote for her.

Agricultural and other household decisions are taken jointly by Bela and her husband.

4.4. Khushboo (Dusadh)

Different caste groups have settled separately and each caste group is clustered together because of '*chua-chhat*' (purity-pollution, untouchability, discrimination). Though there is intermingling among castes and they visit each other's houses, they

do not touch other's utensils or any other stuff. Khushboo says that it is because she is from a lower-caste. When they go to *bhumihars*' houses, they are served in plastic glasses. This hurts their self-respect and dignity, they do not want other to see them drinking from plastic glasses. There is strict endogamy in the village, though few households have different thoughts on the matter. There very few households who do believe in '*chua-chhat*'. There are few guptas who serve Dusadhs in their utensils. I am asked by Khushboo and Parveen about '*chua-chhat*' and inter-caste marriages in my city and generally. To my response that the former is not practised and the latter is common, Parveen replies that this is good because both have the same blood and the only difference is that one eats better and sleeps on a comfortable bed while we have chapatti with salt and sleeps on a charpoy i.e. '*haan theek, khun to ek hain, bas ek jyaada achcha khaata hain, hum roti-namak khaate hain, ek bistar par sots hain, ek charpai par sota hain.*'

On social occasions like weddings, '*chua-chhat*' might be overlooked. When asked if they tell *badkas* that they do not want to be served in plastic glasses, Khushboo responds by way of a question that if she were to ask someone to give her some sense, then would she get it? ('*Ab agar hum kisi se kahe ki humko samajh de do, to humko samajh mil jaayegi?*'). There is no benefit of caste groups being clustered together, other than the fact that they unite in case of any adverse situation. The *Ahir* hamlet is not perceived as a part of the village and this is explained by Parveen by way of lack of integration in the village life and they visit that part of the village only if there is some work i.e. '*vha itna aana-jaana roj ka nahi hain, vha aur kauno kaam hota hain to jaate hain.*'

In comparison with earlier agricultural practices, people now use more fertilizers and better seeds which yield a greater produce. The increase in money incomes and remittances mean that people can now afford these more. However, fertilizers and seeds have become very expensive now.

Prior to the introduction and spread of tubewell boring, irrigation use to be a problem. Villagers had to dig drains connecting and channelling water from the canal to their fields. Recently, under a government scheme, boring was done for free for *harijans*, but other expenses had to be borne by the beneficiary. Boring was also done in

Khushboo's field. Now she rents a pumpset at hundred rupees per hour to irrigate her field. To get boring done in their field, Khushboo's husband had to go to the block several times and about hundred rupees were spend on travelling only.

Khushboo cannot say anything specifically about the impact of mechanisation on the availability of agricultural wage labour. Ever since she started doing wage labour, work is available only intermittently. There number of labourers has increased. Male labour has been more affected than female labour. The latter are only involved in sowing, harvesting and threshing. Male labour does most of the work, ploughing, digging and even migrating.

Migration took off in a big way about fifteen-twenty years ago when no employment was available in the villages and people did not get enough to eat.

Construction of roads and house and brick kilns have emerges as sources of employment in the last two decades or so. Only men work at brick kilns. Khushboo believes that women do not work there because they do not know how to do that type of work and nor will they be able to learn. After working at the kilns for some time and making money, some men open a shop at the village junction or within the village itself. Recruitment in brick kilns is either debt based or through contractors and labourers who work at these kilns. Women have not benefited from these opportunities because they do not do such work.

Khushboo's father-in-law owned approximately three *beegha* land which was equally sub-divided among his three sons. Ramagya inherited one *beegha*. Prior to land consolidation, this was in four small plots. Some land was lost in the process of land consolidation, though they received better quality land. Some part was lost when a road was built, but this was barren land. At present, Khushboo's family has ten *kathas*. Other villagers also lost some land in the process of land consolidation or were a allocated inferior quality land. *Badkas* were able to pressure and bribe officials into allocating them better land or augmenting their holdings, while the poor got inferior or even barren land. At that time, the poor were not even given a hearing and the older generation would tolerate this for who would fight?

Khushboo's husband does handpump boring work in the village and surrounding areas like Faazilnagar and Gurvaliya. He had learned this from another '*mistry*' (skilled labourer) in the village. In a month, he is able to bag two or three handpump boring work. A prospective employer calls at his house and tells him what is required. The husband, Ramagya, then puts together two or three other men from the village for the job. They are paid one hundred and fifty rupees per day. The work can be usually completed in one day, but at times may take two days. The employer provides all the inputs but in cases where labour has purchased these, they are refunded. Ramagya undertakes only spade work related wage labour.

[In midst of this, Khushboo asks Ramagya to go for sugarcane harvesting in *badka babu's* field, but he refuses. Khushboo bemoans that if only he would work, they would be able to save some money for their daughters' weddings. But the husband always says that if there is no money, they can sell the land for their marriage]. Khushboo's husband was a migrant previously. He migrated to Chandigarh with other villagers and worked as a vegetable vendor there. Once he went to Surat with some villagers who use to work there. In Surat, he worked for a Marwari clothes shop owner. He carried clothes on his head and travelled to different villages to sell them. He was paid three thousand rupees per month and from this he had to pay for his accommodation, food and other expenses as well. Wherever he went, he worked for four or five months and then returned to the village. He could send about fifteen hundred to two thousand rupees every two to three months. Ramagya stopped migrating five years after his marriage because of ill-health.

In their ten *katha* land, they would sow sugarcane and wheat. In a season, they can produce about three to five quintals of wheat and this is used for self-consumption. The sugarcane is sold to the mill and this year Khushboo sold about twenty quintals at the rate of hundred rupees per quintal. They usually do not need to buy wheat because the stock is supplemented by what they get under the PDS. However, since last year about four *kathas* have been mortgaged against a debt of about ten thousand rupees, taken out for construction of the house. On the mortgaged land, the creditor cultivates wheat, makes all investments and is entitled to the entire produce. They did not approach the bank for a loan because they would not be able to pay the interest. She is not asked to provide unpaid labour services by her creditors.

Khushboo started doing agricultural wage labour many years after her wedding. Till the time her in-laws were living, she was only involved in domestic chores and in won agriculture (not immediately after marriage). She only started doing wage labour when she was older. Her husband only does spade related work in their field. She may also undertake spade work in her field, but never in others for she worries if she (or women in general) will be able to do such work. In her field, she can work at her own pace and take breaks. She does not perform wage labour in other fields because she feels shy and also because she does not have the time.

Khushboo never goes out looking for wage labour. She is contacted by a contractor. For example, if Parveen was to contact her regarding some wage labour, she would ask Parveen about the nature of work, location, how much she would be paid etc. Khushboo works in women only groups. If there were to be one or two men from own village then too it would be fine because they and their families are know each other. Her husband does not approve of her working with unknown men.

For most agricultural wage labour, they are paid on a daily wage rate basis. Though payments may not be made daily at the end of the work day but at the completion of work.

Anyone who is a strong and capable of organising labour can become a contractor. Contractors favour their caste members, relatives, neighbours etc in recruiting labour. There are three labour groups in the village-one works for Lata who is a Dusadh contractor, one group works with Leelavati who is a Dhobi contractor and the third is Sudarshan's wife (Gupta). Khushboo works with Lata. Labourers do not change groups in mid-season. Two contractors and their group of labourers may work together if the demand for labour is more. Labour groups comprise members from different castes and clashes among members are common on petty issues of who has sowed more than others, another member not working fast enough or just sitting out.

Khushboo may negotiate with a contractor or employer over wages or if they would be given tea and something to eat. She tells me that if *badka babu* was to call her for some work, she would ask for a raise. She may even refuse to go for work, if he did

not agree. But then there is no point in sitting at home. Some other labourers, for instance like Parveen, might take on the job. She would be angry with these labourers but after few days things would be back to normal between them. Some time later, *badka babu* himself may again have to call her for work when others have refused.

The contractors retain a share of the labourers' wages. The contractor may pay labour less than the wage agreed upon at the start of the work. The latter then approach the employer and ask him how much he paid the contractor. If it is revealed that the contractor did not pay the full amount as given by the employer, the labourers then approach the contractor and question her. The contractor would try to defend herself by saying that the employer lied. A fight ensues. The contractor challenges the labourers to report her at the police station, holds her ears (an apologetic gesture seeking forgiveness) and insists that the employer lied. The next time if the same employer approached the same contractor, the latter may refuse to work with him because he caused a rift between her and labour. When probed if she would work with this contractor again, Khushboo says that if there is nothing to eat, then that much money only would at least fetch a meal, '*jab khaane ko nahi hoga to utne paise mein hi kam se kam ek time ka khana milega.*' Khushboo definitively asserts that such episodes are repeated. If wages are much delayed or are less than what they were told, a labourer may talk about it with another labourer who had worked on the same job and then she might talk with another and so on. A consensus emerges that they would approach the contractor or the employer or that they would not work for him the next time. The employer will then have to call upon labour from another village.

Labourers do not try to deliberately stretch out work because they want to finish it as soon as possible and then move onto the next job.

As a way of controlling labour, contractors work alongside labourers. The employer may also be present at site because in his presence labour works diligently, while in his absence, labourers chat among themselves and work slowly. When the employer is present at the field then labour is constantly under pressure to finish the work that day itself.

There are no bonded labourers in the village now. People now work for money. Khushboo may even refuse to work for someone with whom she has fought over livestock straying in fields or a fight between their kids or just because she does not want to work for that employer. Once Khushboo's goat had strayed into Radhakrishna's (another Dusadh) field and the two households are not on good terms now. Neither does she get called upon by them for work and nor would she work for them. Khushboo is not involved in *begari* labour. She gets stuff from stores on credit and deposits money later.

Exchange labour is common among *chutkas*.

Under the Indira Awaas Yojna, Khushboo received an instalment of eighteen thousand of which she had to give three thousand and six hundred rupees to the pradhan. The remaining six thousand will be received when a further two thousand are paid to the pradhan. She was told by the pradhan that if she would pay him, he would help her in getting Awaas money, because he has to work hard to get it-approach the authorities, travelling takes time and money, possibly grease some palms etc., i.e. '*usko daud- dhoop karni padti hai, tel-paani kharch hota hai, paisa do to awaas dilayenge.*' People from rich caste groups like Rajputs, Guptas or Ahirs have got Awaas money, but from her caste group few have got. When they approach the pradhan for it, he tells them that will not be given Awaas money because they did not for him.

At the time of elections, candidates including the pradhan promise Awaas money, tubewell borings etc. '*Tab laalach pakad leti hai ki dhan milega*', i.e. Parveen adds that at that time they are swayed by promises of money and other benefits. In the past it is known to happen that a pradhan in collusion with the police stands at the ballot box and tells people where to stamp.

Khushboo asserts that if someone from her caste was standing for the post of pradhan, she would definitely help him (by voting for him). '*Jab duniya jaat ke peeche chalti hain, tu hum nahi challenge kya?*' i.e. if the whole world is obsessed with the issue of caste, then why shouldn't she be? She also believes that tomorrow if someone from her caste was to be elected pradhan, he would not help her. But she would help him

because there is no point in letting her vote go waste i.e. '*vote rakh kar kya hoga?*' She has benefited under the present pradhan's tenure because she got Awaas money. Khushboo tells me that at one time the present pradhan had asked her husband to keep him informed about everything that *badka babu* does and say to the villagers. Her husband refused though. Since then are not on very good terms with the pradhan also. However, Khushboo reiterates at the same time that for her, both *badka babu* and the pradhan are equal. She would still work for the pradhan but not for Radhakrishna. They get the most employment from *badka babu*, followed by the pradhan. Rest all provide employment for just a day or two.

'*Netagiri*' (petty politics) is common among labourers. One labourer may ask the other to serve as witness for something, but the latter will go only if he wants to. Guptas and Telis are most involved in such issues. For example, when Khushboo's husband fought with Radhakrishna, the latter lodged complaints at Turpatti and Patherva police stations and paid twenty thousand rupees each to bring in Ramagya and beat him up. However, though the police took the money, they did not take any action and said that it was a false case. '*Gaon mein yeh netagiri hoti hain ki kisi ke kehne pe koi bhi kisi ko fasa deta hain paise ke liye*', i.e. it is common in villages where anyone, when incited by any other person, is willing to cause trouble to anyone else. Parveen adds that the world runs on money, '*duniya paise par chalti hain.*' Khushboo adds that, if paid, even she would do it. However, when prodded further, Parveen is offended and asserts that she was she never took money from *badka babu* to complain against the pradhan, she is not greedy for money and always speaks the truth. Now Khushboo also claims the same. Khushboo says that her caste people fight a lot amongst themselves. It is common that people make fun of others, even incite one to beat another because the latter fights a lot with him. But if her friend was in danger, Khushboo would never ridicule or laugh at her. According to Khushboo, there is no common ground of interest between her caste people or even generally among women in the village.

Khushboo does not attend panchayat meetings. Parveen also agrees. If they attend panchayats, they would be beaten by their husbands. Lata attends panchayat meetings though, when something has to be asked of her. Lata also is a widow.

Labour have not benefitted under Mayawati's rule. '*Usne Awaas thodo dilaya?*' i.e. it was not she who gave Awaas. Though her government increased wages to hundred rupees, employers here give only fifty rupees. Her husband use to get fifty rupees earlier when he worked under MGNREGA, but this was later increased to hundred rupees because *badka babu* had complained about the pradhan.

Khushboo's husband spends a lot of money on alcohol. Parveen also concurs that even her husband drinks too much regularly. If they do not give their husbands the money, they may be beaten. Parveen justifies that her husband drinks on days he has worked a lot because it provides relief to body ache. According to both of them, alcoholism is a problem among lower castes. The upper castes are intelligent enough to save money and construct big houses. The lower castes do not think, don't save and therefore, continue to live in huts.

Household decisions are taken jointly by Khushboo and her husband.

[As the interview draws to a close, we move onto other topics of general interest. Khushboo and Parveen talk of how times have changed so much. Parveen's sister-in-law's daughter is getting married soon and the groom has expressed a wish to see her and speak with her before the actual wedding takes place. In their time they had never even seen their husbands before the wedding. Khushboo and Parveen ask me to show them how their names are written in hindi. I show them but they are hesitant to take the pen and try. Khushboo tries it once and says her head hurts. Khushboo can almost correctly write her husband's name. She tells us that she has studies till class one, after which she discontinued. Her father died when she was very young, so who would have sent her to school? It has been many years since she left school, otherwise she would have been able to write her husband's name correctly. Khushboo's brother was sent to school by her maternal grandfather. To this, Parveen remarked that if sons are educated, it will bring more dowry.]

4.5. Gulab bai (Dusadh)

[This interview was held at Gulab's hut because she has young children and also has to tend to livestock. Her husband does not approve of her going out in the village generally, unless it is for wage labour. Gulab's husband Lalchand is also known to drink and beat her. While she laid out a charpoy for me, Gulab herself refuses to sit alongside me because there is 'difference' between us (referring to our different socio-economic positions). She tells me that she is illiterate, her brother was sent to school by their maternal grandfather.]

Gulab cannot elaborate on issues of land ceiling and consolidation because she was not living in this village then. She has seen rice, wheat and sugarcane being grown in the village ever since she got married i.e. about twenty years or so. Now people do agricultural work themselves, they use machines. There has been a decline in the availability of agricultural wage labour.

No new sources of employment have emerged. Women are involved only in sowing and harvesting, while men do spade work. Her family has not benefited from the coming up of brick kilns, shops at the village junction and migration because no one from her house is involved in these. Only those who do such work benefit from them.

Till three years before, Gulab and her family lived together with her husband's family. However, due to some fight and that Gulab has a large family (nine children), they separated from them. A bamboo partition was erected on the same property and Gulab and her family live on one side and the rest on the other. Her father-in-law owns about ten *katha* land. Before the division of the family, the land was cultivated together and there use to sufficient food for household consumption. Gulab also worked on it. But now Gulab's family has no access to it, though she does mention that upon the father-in-law's death, the land would be equally divided between his two sons and they would get their share. She has to buy grains and food, often on credit from the general store. There has been an increase in household expenses. She cannot go out for wage labour much because of greater household responsibilities.

In view of food insecurity and large family size, around the same time, her husband approached *bhumihar* Kailash *babu* of Sapahi Khurd about leasing out some land to them. Since then, they have leased in about three *katha* from him. This land is in Sapahi Khas. Kailash *babu* himself does not have any family to take care of agriculture. He is old, his son has a mental problem, the daughter-in-law is working (distributes polio vaccines in Tumkuhi) and his grandson is studying outside. Kailash *babu* has leased out land to others as well. No formal documentation was done, all investments are made by Gulab, the yield is equally shared and Kailash *babu* may tell them what to sow. Leased land can be taken back any time and if there is standing crop on it, it has to be returned the next season. They are dependent on canal or rain water to irrigate this land.

Prior to his marriage, Lalchand had once migrated to Nainital, but after marriage has never migrated. '*Ladka bachcha kike bharose chod ke jaaye, ghar ka kaam hi nahi paar lage*', i.e. on whose responsibility could he leave the children and they could not manage all the household work only. He is a skilled labourer. He learned tubewell/handpump boring work while working with someone in Faajilnagar. He has formed a 'team' with two other dhobi men in the village. Whenever either of them secure a job, they take the other two along. They get paid anything between five hundred to six hundred rupees per boring and this is equally shared among the three. They manage to bag a job once every ten to twenty days. In addition, Lalchand also works as an agricultural wage labour and in own agriculture.

Livestock rearing is beneficial. Gulab has a '*batai*' (not owned) buffalo and when this will be sold, half the money will be given to the actual owner. Gulab will then invest her share in buying a buffalo. When it starts giving milk, this will be sold. Her husband helps out in tending to livestock.

Gulab is not involved in any unfree labour relations. She does not work in other households. Not even in Kailash *babu*'s house. She is the daughter-in-law of the village and therefore does not get called upon by anyone for working in their house. In contrast, **Lata** is a daughter of the village and gets frequently called by various households to do some work for them within the houses. However, if *badka babu* was to call her for work at the same time as she was working with **Lata** on another job,

she would leave the latter and do the former's work first. *Badka babu* lets her cut grass from his fields for fodder, lets her take her livestock to his fields for grazing. Her kids defecate in his fields, play there. It is beneficial to work for *badka babu* whose field neighbours her house in comparison to working for the *pradhan* whose field is at some distance therefore of not much use or benefit. *Badka babu* provides maximum wage employment, followed by the *pradhan*. The latter has a large family and they undertake most of the agricultural work themselves. The latter does not allow children in his fields, whereas, the former allows children to level the soil in his fields and depending on their age, children are paid money ranging from five to fifteen rupees.

If she did not complete his work first, would he not beat her and her children? Gulab is scared of taking out debts for what would happen if they were not able to return it?

Labour groups are formed when weeding and sowing work starts. These groups may change frequently. Gulab is a member of **Lata's** labour party, but she also works for anyone else who may call on her. She does not actively go out in search of work. Employers directly call on labourers. They know who to approach, the poor and the huts symbolise poverty. Gupta caste does not undertake wage labour because they have enough to eat and drink. Dusadhs do not have enough to eat and therefore need to do wage labour. Gulab elaborates that *Bhumihars* from this village do not go to contractors. They themselves call upon labour. For example, if weeding has to be done in his field, then *badka babu* himself would individually call upon the houses of labourers. But if the employer was from another village, he would approach a contractor because he does not know the villagers. Previously, Gulab was a member of the Gupta labour party. There is no difference in working for different contractors in terms of their behaviour, wage system, styles of recruitment etc.

Gulab also does wage labour in neighboring villages of Sapahi Khurd and Sapahi Bujurg but not in distant villages like Ramkola and Karmani, because of '*laaj*' and domestic responsibilities. She then clarifies that she does not undertake wage labour in areas beyond *badka babu's* house because she fears that in her absence her buffalo may stray in his field or her children may cause harm to his crops. Employers know **Lata** is a contractor because she travels a lot and even to distant places for work.

When **Lata** calls upon Gulab for wage labour, she is asked about the nature of work, location, wages, will she be served water etc. Labour also may negotiate with the contractor to get a wage raise or they would not go for work. But, if this does not work out and no employer raises wage rates, labour has to go back to work. It has happened in the past that Gulab has been paid less than the promised wages. According to her, **Lata** deducts wages and keeps them with herself and tells labour to go to the employer. Labour gets to know that they have been cheated but when the contractor herself stoops to this, then what can labour do? Gulab, does not confront **Lata**. *Do rupiye rakh kar kauno raja ho jaata hai?* i.e. the implication is that one does not become a 'king' (rich) by two rupees. She gets more wage labour through Lata than through employers who directly call her for wage labour. *'jisko ladna ho Lata se, voh ladta hai jaakar'*, those who want to argue with her, can go and do so. Employers from other villages pay higher wages in comparison to those from this village. Wages are paid at the completion of work. At times, employers serve tea, water and some sweets to labourers, but not everyday of work.

Labourers try to draw out the work for a day more so that they can get wages for two days instead of just one. This is particularly the case if the land is more than ten *katha*. They work at a slow pace. The contractor keeps hollering and lashing out at labour to hurry up, but then the labour turns back and threatens the contractor that they are going to sleep and she can do the work by herself (*'phir kar le apne aap, hum jaate hain saune'*). However, in contractual work, if the work is not completed in time (say, within the day), then the contractor loses money because then she may be forced to pay labour from her own pocket for the extra day. Gulab smiles slyly and says that then she would catch hold of Lata and demand money for the additional day of labour. Lata cannot afford to let go of Gulab because no one else would go in her place for wage labour the next time. People would wonder that why did someone who regularly worked for Lata suddenly stop, for sure, there must have been some problem with the contractor. In cases of relatively larger fields, labour puts pressure on the contractor that the work cannot be completed in one day. The contractor may approach the employer and inform him that it will take two days to finish and therefore the initial amount agreed under the contract should be increased. If the employer does not agree, then labour deliberately does bad quality work. *'...theek se*

nahi nuchenge, laat se daba denge, nauchenge nahi, kaam chod kar ghar bhaag jaayenge time par’ i.e. if there is too grass to be weeded then they will not pull it out, but just press it down with their legs or even hurry back to their houses as soon as it time.

It is more common for labour to resort to these tactics in other villages. There they simply take the money and run back to the refuge of their homes. But in own village, where will one run to? Employers from own village may even report them to the panchayat which then calls upon the contractor and labourers. They are asked to apologise or do the work properly without pay or the panchayat issues a rebuke. The panchayat asks the employer to forgive the labourers and assures them that they will not do it again. The contractors defend that there were not enough seeds and fertilizer and it was also very hot. Gulab claims that even if they were to be reported to the panchayat four times, labour would not go back to the work on the field without pay and the employer will have to accept this for otherwise no one would go to his field.

While this pradhan favours his caste people, it is not definite that if one from Gulab’s caste was to become a pradhan that he would help out his caste people. It would depend on how he thinks. She also does not feel that there have been any benefits for labour under Mayawati’s regime.

Gulab attends panchayats only when specifically asked to attend. Sometimes or when her husband has been called by the panchayat, she hides and eavesdrops. [Parveen at first claims to publicly attend panchayat meetings, but then later seems to agree with Gulab’s version].

Whether *badka* or *chutka*, everyone is involved in ‘*netagiri*’.

In the first instalment of Awaas money, Gulab received eighteen thousand rupees of which four thousand rupees were ‘retained’ by the pradhan. The next instalment has not been received yet.

It is claimed that all household decisions are jointly taken. However, Gulab remarks to Parveen that she has done a lot of wage labour, but she never gets to see any

money. It is taken by her husband. However, she is given some money when she asks for it to purchase *bindi, sindoor*. Her husband buys food and other things. Both Gulab and Parveen talk about how when they wear new clothes and dressed up, their husbands always questioned their intentions. Parveen's husband does not help her in domestic work or even in tending to livestock. If she is ever unable to work because of ill-health, the husband taunts her that she should go back to her parents. Once Parveen even went back and stayed there for three months. She only came back after her husband had visited her there twice or thrice in an effort to placate her. Gulab tells her that at times she also goes to her parents place when her husband has fought with her. Parveen adds that at times she cannot attend religious gatherings (which typically are held at night) because he does not like her to be away from home late at night.

4.6. Lata (Dusadh)

Lata was born in Sapahi Khas. She was educated till class two in the public school. After this her schooling was discontinued because of poverty.

Different caste groups are clustered together because people will settle wherever they get land and where their field is located.

Before the introduction of machines, people did not have enough to eat. '*Anaaj nahi hota tha, aise hi khet mein aag laga dete the. Ab nahar se, potash say, khadar se, dher anaaj hota hai. Ab to duniya bhar ki khaddar aati hai. Pehle bail the to ek hi khet mein fase rehte the, ab bail dikte nahi hain*'. Meaning that foodgrains could not be produced then but now but now because of canal, potash and fertilisers, lot of foodgrains can be produced. Fertilisers from worldover are now available. Earlier there were oxen and it took ages to do one field, now oxen are hardly seen. Now labourers get work only during the weeding and sowing seasons and the rest of the time, labour is idle. However, they now get more weeding work because earlier the produce would be so low that what would one weed?

Migration started about twelve years or so previously. When one is hungry, there is no food to eat, what will one do if not go out and earn? Lata's response to why women don't migrate is a vociferous what can women do, men will earn and women

will sit at home and eat! Though she does not receive any remittances from her sons as their families also migrate with them, she does not have to bear their expense. Lata does not undertake brick kiln wage labour, no labourers would go with her. No one comes to the village to recruit them, but people go by themselves to work at kilns. When Parveen queried if she could go, she is told by Lata that she will not be able to do as much work as '*rachinis*' (incoming female migrant labour from Ranchi) and her husband would not allow her to go as well. If she were to go alone then, then there would be gossip in the village that she is an alcoholic and has gone to the *bhatta* to get alcohol ('*gaon mein baval ho jaayega, sab kahenge ki piyakkar jodne gayi hai*'). Everyone at kilns drinks and if Lata was to go there, she would be subjected to teasing and harassment.

Prior to land consolidation, Lata's parents owned about one and a half *beegha*. This land was in small plots in different locations and not of good quality. Post consolidation, they were allocated one *beegha* in one location and this land was relatively of better quality. Her father had to pay five hundred rupees for this. Other also had paid money to get good quality land. Some even lost land in consolidation process. This one *beegha* was equally sub-divided between Lata and her three sisters. Lata has no brother. When she was about twenty years old, Lata was married and she moved to Jalalpur. Meanwhile, her elder sister bought land of other two sisters. Lata had refused to sell her share because her husband's land in Jalalpur was drowned in floods and they moved to Sapahi Khas. Lata got the land transferred in Lata's name.

Presently, Lata has about six *katha* land in her name. Since one year she has leased in one and a half *katha* land from a Dhobi. No paperwork was involved and she makes all the investments and decisions. The produce is equally shared. The land can be taken back at any time but only after harvest. She had leased in land from the point of view of food security. This Dhobi is one of Lata's neighbour. He is in Bombay or Surat, while his wife and young sons live in the village. There is no one available to take care of agriculture. So Lata had approached him to lease out the land to her. She would cultivate it and give half the yield to his family to eat. Now that her sons are older and have migrated out to earn, she can invest some money and cultivate the leased land. When her sons were much younger, she was forced to ask people like Parveen (who is a distant relative of Lata's) to help out with food. Lata uses tubewell

irrigation. She does not have a boring on her land and has to hire a pump-set at hundred rupees per hour.

Lata started doing agricultural wage labour few years after her schooling was discontinued. Initially, she would do things like weeding, carry headloads of grass and dumping them in one place, tending to livestock, dealing with cowdung etc. Lata worked in the village only till she was about fifteen or sixteen years old. She was taught various agricultural tasks as she worked in the fields alongside her parents, relatives and others. Only when she was properly trained, did she started sowing work and wage labour in other villages as well.

Badka Babu's father (referred to as masterji because he was a teacher) used to call her to weed his field and would also let her play in the field. Masterji called upon labourers houses for work and when he was unable to recruit labour directly, masterji would approach labour through contractor Ismail. Ismail would call then call upon labourers. He would also ask Lata to work and would tell her that if is she worked well, she would be given money. He paid her less than than what was paid to women because she could get less done than them. As a kid she earned about eight *annas* per day, women would earn five rupees per day and men earned twenty to thirty rupees. Later, she would go with Ismail to work in other viallges as well. Masterji would get angry with Lata went she worked in other villages. Even then, Masterji paid wages lower than other employers.

Lata returned to Sapahi Khas only two to four years after her marriage and again started working with Ismail. Her house was constructed on barren land and she was told by villagers to settle there. One year after her return, Ismail died and with this his party of labourers also fell apart. At Ismail's death, Lata wondered who would she work with now and only if she worked with her with, will she get to eat (*'Ab ki ke saath kaam kari jaayi, apni buddhi se kaam kari to khaaye ke paayi'*). Thereafter, Lata formed her own group of labourers. *'Buddhi ho gayi, hushiyar ho gaye, jab humko dangh aagaya ki jimma le sakte hain, jana jod sakte hain, paisa jod sakte hain, tab khud party bana li'* i.e. when Lata was more astute and smart, when she could recruit and organise labour and manage money, then she formed her labour group. This also benefitted her. Employers would give contractors ten rupees or so more, to

have tea and so that they would get the job done. Lata's husband was not a consideration and did not stop her from doing any such thing. Parveen elaborates that when Lata's children were very young, her husband took renunciation. He went to Ujarnath *mandir* (temple), became a sage and grew a long beard. He was physically weak and could not do much work. Lata adds that he use to complain of stomach ache, He dies four or five years after that. Lata was the sole provider and single-handedly brought up her children. She would ask other villagers for food. Now that her children are grown up, they earn. Now she does not ask anyone for anything. Shse has tea without milk because milk is for eighteen to twenty rupees. She has been working as a contractor for fourtenn or fifteen years now.

At present, Lata is not in debt. Once she had borrowed six thousand ruppess from someone in Sapahi Khurd for her son's marriage. She had to pay an interest of three thousand and two hundred on it. She again borrowed for her younger son's wedding, three thousand rupees from Usha Rai in sapahi Khurd. She was able to return this money within two to three months only and had to pay an interest of six hundred rupees on it. She had not approached the banks. According to Parveen, travelling to and fr from the bank takes up a lot of money and so does the paperwork involved.

There are no bonded labourers in the village.

Employers identify labourers by way of their huts, poverty. Employers observe who works with women everyday, they also enquire and then are told that this person can organise labour and get the job done. This is how people come to know that Lata is a contractor. A contractor should also know how to recruit labour, manage money and distribute wages. Lata claims that she is the only contractor in the village. There are not so many labourers that there can be two parties in the village. She can get together as many labourers as one wants and she claims to have once organised two hundred labourers as well.

A labour party has between ten and twenty members. It depends on the work requirements. Once the work is completed, the party does not break up. If the next job required a fewer number of labourers, then Lata would first recruit her main members-those from her own caste, who have more with her, those she is more close

to etc like Parveen, Birbati and Leelavati. When asked if the other party members left behind don't argue with her, Lata says that she makes excuses to them and placates them by telling them that she will take them for wage labour the next day when more labourers are required. In recruiting labourers she also considers factors like proximity, efficiency because that saves her money, who do good work, whom she gets along with and those whose company she likes. She promises labour more money if they work for her. If a contractor does not have sufficient labourers, then she might approach another contractor and request her help (*'A behani, kaam kara di'*.) Then the second contractor would take her party members as well. The first contractor takes wages from the employer, gives it to the second contractor who then distributes wages to her labourers. The 'extra' given to the first contractor by the employer for *'chai-paani'* is equally shared with the second contractor.

Presently, Lata's lists about thirty labourers who have been working with her over the past five years. Most of them are Dusadhs and Dhobis. The few Ahirs in her party are from the main settlement of the village. According to Lata the Ahir hamlet has a separate party. There are no Ansaris in her party. *'Voh majdoori nahi karte, unke paas dhan hai, bahar se paisa kama lete hain'* i.e. they do not do wage labour because they have money and they earn from outside (implying migration). With the exception of four members who are from neighbouring villages, all members are from Sapahi Khas. Most of these members are inter-related. When specifically asked, Lata also lists names of several men and claims that they are a part of her party and also do tasks like sowing and weeding, in addition to various types of spade work. If she is asked to organise labour for any type of spade work, she asks the male members to do the job. For other agricultural tasks, she asks the women first. Later, Lata adds that her party is not contracted for spade work. Male contractors only take spade work related contracts and wages. She has worked with other labourers as well in the past, but not any more. *'Voh jhanjat karte the, kehte the jyada paise dilao. Jab khethar dega, tabhi to denge'*, meaning that those labourers were aggravating, would get into arguments and demand higher wages, but that could only be if the employer paid that much.

Her party goes to far off places like Ramkola and Karmani, but fewer labourers go to distant sites and get double the usual wage. For example, instead of ten, only five

women go and do the work of ten women. In these cases they do not even get time to eat.

Local employers and *bhumihars* and those from neighbouring villages like Sapahi Bujurg and Sapahi Khurd, recruit labour directly by going door-to-door. This costs them less because they do not have to pay extra to the contractor for tea and such. In few cases, they might send someone to approach a contractor. Labour prefers to work outside the village because they get higher wages there. Since so many days, only two men have been working on *badka babu's* field-Irshid and Parveen's husband. While other pay hundred rupees per day for spade work, he only pays seventy rupees per day. But these men have to work for him. '*Voh unke main hai, chahe prem ho, jabardasti karaye, chahe jo ho*', i.e. they are his main labourers and they have to work for him, irrespective of whether they are being coerced or they are doing it out of affection and devotion.

All agricultural tasks can be done either on contractual or daily wage rate basis.

Wages are determined by the amount of physical labour involved. *Sohni pandrah rupaye hain kyunki baith kar karte hain; rupani mein pehle beej ukhadte hain, phir raupate ahin, is liye bees rupaye hain; kudari paani peekar din bhar chalte hain, dono haat phool jaate hain, dahi dard karat hain, to saat rupaye nahi maange ge?* Meaning, fifteen rupees are paid for weeding because one sits and does it, rupani involves pulling out seedlings and then sowing it and therefore twenty rupees are paid for it, one does spade work for the entire day on just water, both arms swell and the body aches, so wouldn't one ask for sixty rupees?

A contractor attempts to negotiate wage at the time she is approached by the employer or someone on his behalf. For example, once informed about the task and the land size, Lata would quote a particular sum and the number of labourers that would be required. The employer would then say that if others pay that much, then he would also pay that. Lata would assert that everywhere they get that amount and he should also give the same amount and so on. If the employer agrees, she organises a labour group and does the work next day and if the employer does not agree, Lata may refuse to take on the work and tell the employer to get labour from somewhere else

(*'Khethaar se kehta hain itna paisa mili to hamar jana jaayega, varna jaakar kahi aur se dhoo le'*). At times, the employer may not agree in the first instance and leave without finalising anything. After giving it some thought, the employer may approach Lata again. Then Lata would coax him in a gentle voice (Lata demonstrates) that if he were to give them that amount, she would do his work as well (*'A babu, humko de na utna, to tumhar kamo kar di'*). The employer would then benevolently tell her that he would give her that wage and she should get the job done (*'Chali, de denge, hamar kaam kar de'*). However, if she has gone without wage labour for some time, then she agrees. Lata qualifies that she has empathy only for *badka babu* and she can bear with whatever he gives, if he does some work for her. [Though later, the same day as this interview was conducted, *badka babu* remarked to me that '*Lata se gira to koi hain nahi, asal mein woh log usko sar par chadaye hue hain*']. Such negotiations or haggling is done by the contractor and not labour directly. The latter approach the contractor with demands for wage hike.

Wages are paid at the completion of work. *'Jab kaarya karke laut te hain to maangte hain khethar se, paise ki de do, jana logo ko batna hain'* i.e. having completed the work, on their return, Lata asks the employer to pay so that she can distribute wages among the labourers. If the work lasts only a day, labourers are paid at the end of the work day. If it goes on for a week or so, they may be paid once in two or three days. In addition to wages, at times, labourers may be served with tea and sweets on site. The employer gives these to the contractor who then distributes them among labour. If he does not pay at that time, then Lata confronts him. *'Usse ladai jhagda thodi karenge, usko gariyaenge, ladenge, kahenge ke utha ke phak denge'*, Lata would not pick up a conflict with him but a heated exchange will ensue with Lata threatening to throw him. In case of daily wage work, they ask for wages at the completion of work, otherwise the landowners get irritated. But, where labour has prolonged worked 'too much', the employers may deduct their wages. *'Dus din hue to aath din ka hi denge, aath din hue to che ke hi denge'*, 'if it has been ten days, they will pay for eight days; if it has been eight days, they will pay for six days.' Labour retaliates by refusing to work for them the next time. In daily wage work, labourers directly approach the landowner for wages.

Other than *badka babu*, Rajinder pradhan is the other *bhumihar* in the village. In comparison to *badka babu* he pays higher wages. People work for *badka babu* for less in the hope that he would help them in times of need. *Badka babu* also thinks that if not today, then tomorrow his work will be done. According to Lata, the pradhan has more money than *badka babu*. '*Saare gaon se mooch kar khayega to hoga nahi?*', will he not have it when he takes from the entire village? But if Lata was to give priority to pradhan's work, *badka babu* is annoyed and he taunts her that his work will not be done, but the pradhan's will be done. Lata would loudly reply that if he were to pay as much as him, then his work would also be done on time. *Badka babu* would then say he that from where can he pay that kind of money (Chaina imitates his voice). [According to *badka babu* he had scolded Lata yesterday i.e. a day prior to when this interview was conducted that why did she not go for sugarcane harvesting in his field and Lata has said in a placating voice that she did not go, but her daughter went and how is it possible that he asks her to work and she does not?]

In cases of daily wage work, labour works slowly and tries to draw out work. '*Jana dheere-dheere karte hain, baatein karat hain, kahte hain ki dheere-dheere karo, bihane aayi kaam kare*', 'labour works leisurely, they chat, they say that work slowly, we will come tomorrow to work'. The land owner tries to cajole labour. '*Arre thoda aur soh do*', i.e. he urges labour to do just a little more and so on. This is not the case in contractual work, for instance, where the employer has contracted at fifty rupees per *katha* for weeding or sowing or sixty rupees per *katha* for spade work or one *bhoja* for ten *bhojas*. In this case, labour is efficient and tries to be as quick as possible. This is because irrespective of how long labour takes to finish the task, the amount is fixed. Most contract work lasts for two to three days, while daily wage work lasts for five to six days. The contractor and labourers are paid similar wages, though the landowner may pay the contractor five or ten rupees extra for '*chai-paani*'.

The landowner remains at the field (whoever from the family has time, supervises labour) while labour is working, but not so much in contractual work. '*Khethar peeche-peeche rahat hain, warna jana batyaai, theek se na kari*', the employer is constantly at the labourers because otherwise labour would talk chat and not work

properly. Lata scolds the labourers that they should work properly or leave (*'Aise kaam karo, warna bhaag jao'*).

Bhumihars and Rajputs are the largest sources of employment. There is a difference in working of for them and other caste employers. The former may give clothes or food to one so that their work will be done. Lower-caste employers do not give anything. They do all the work themselves.

Exchange labour relations exist among lower-castes.

There are a lot of disagreements and petty fights among labourers all the time [a boy who had joined us tells me that they fight the entire night] and lower-castes. For example, over where they should go to work, where they should not go etc. [A part of this interview was conducted at her house and in between she fought with another as water from her hand-pump was going to their door and then Lata tells me that no one can suppress her (*'hum kauno se dab kar nahi rahi'*). Lata gives two rupees more to her main labourers but these then let it out to other members of the party who come and argue with her. Her main members would coax her to give the others as well, but Lata justifies that she does not have the money to do so. Lata gives a little extra to her main labourers because they work more than others. This happens all the time.

Even *badka babu* and *pradhan* have their own main labourers. The latter do not fight, but the main labour of *badka babu* would not work for the *pradhan* and vice-versa and neither would they be asked. There is tension between *Badka babu* and *pradhan's* households. Lata has never fought with another contractor but she once fought with her friend Vidavati. The latter had once been given two hundred and fifty rupees by an employer for whom Lata and her party had done some contract work and who met Vidavati in Ujarnath market. He had asked her to give this money to Lata who is from her village so that she can distribute it to the labourers. Later the employer told Lata to collect the money from Vidavati. But Vidavati had used the money and did not give any money even when Lata and labourers fought with her. Now whenever Vidavati calls labourers for work, they refuse to go with her. However, Vidavati does undertake wage labour as a part of Lata's party. Lata thinks benevolently that it's fine, she can work with them (*'Arre chalo, hamare saat tumho kaam kar lo, chali.'*)

Labourers fight and then cool down. Labourers' enter into heated verbal exchanges but does not lodge formal reports against each other. They fight and then unite. In the village, people need each other. For example, Lata may clean grains, take them to the grinder's, help someone with getting a sackful of mud (which is wet and spread on the hut floor to keep it clean). In return, she is given some rice or wheat.

[Bantering among labourers is common and one way of expressing their jealousies, taunts, things which cannot be openly said and other underlying feelings. For example, while we were talking, a man who had joined us remarked to Lata that she is pradhan's bodyguard, she has even got Awaas. Another remarked that when she had gone to pradhan for it, she was scolded and sent away. Another remarked that the pradhan had told him to first open an account because the Awaas money would come in it and he opened an account with thousand rupees but so far has not received the Awaas money. Everyone present then started discussing how opening an account takes five hundred to a thousand rupees and that everyone takes a bribe. If one was supplying a load of trolley somewhere, then one trolley load would be 'retained'].

Lata claims to be a '*sadras*' (member) of panchayat. [Lata is a part of the panchayat and according to *badka babu* she is from a seat reserved for SC woman]. She attends all panchayat meetings. Though she does not benefit from being a panchayat member because the pradhan does not pay her anything, her purpose in attending these meetings is to support the pradhan, discussions over budget take place there, various decisions are made like should a gate be build here or a house, to act as a witness alongwith four or five other people etc. Lata puts her thumb impression on paper and sometimes her son signs for her. She was chosen as a member because she can articulate and speak up, who can answer back and one who does not hide. She does not get any money from the pradhan. She does this job because the pradhan is from own village and she feels that she should support and help him whenever he needs it because would he not help her in times of need?

Lata does not get to work in road construction (work usually done under MGNREGA scheme) because she does not have a job card. She does not apply for one also because her son is a migrant worker and she does not want one. '*Kaam karo ya nahi, kya pata ussme kya bhar de, phir hum paisa uthane jaaye to humko pachaas rupaiye*

thama de aur baaki rakh le, ja hum nahi banvai’ i.e. ‘whether or not one works, who knows what is filled in it, then when I go to collect money, they give me fifty rupees only and keep the rest, I will not get one made.’ [But the next day Lata told me that her son is going to do this work for the first time and though he does not have a job card, he will be paid hundred rupees by the pradhan]. Lata has not benefitted from this new source of employment because no one calls her for this work. Women come from other areas and do such work. But their pradhan says that women will not be able to do such work. They have never approached any authority over the pradhan, like the Block, over this because Lata cannot go alone and she does not know who to approach where. No one would support her. Also, how can she possibly go for such work as lifting headloads of mud and grit if no one takes contract and responsibility because otherwise if she went, then who would pay her? The men from this village who are involved in such work, do not ask women. Lata would feel shy to work with them and would only go if many other women go as well.

She believes that if there was to be a pradhan from her own caste group, he would help them, provide Awaas money and old age pension. He would not take money from them. When she is asked that why then she or someone from her caste contest, Lata answers that what can she alone do? (*‘Hamare akele kude-faande se kya hoga, ek thodo hoga?’*). *‘Tab politics hoga, chaar log voh le jaayenge* (nodding in the direction of *badka babu’s* house), *chaar log voh leh jaayenge* (nodding in the direction of pradhan’s house), meaning that then there would be politics, four supporters will be taken by *badka babu* and four will be taken by the pradhan. The present pradhan was able to achieve a united vote lobby and secure votes because he distributed money, alcohol and blouses.

Lata does not feel that labour or lower castes have benefitted under Mayawati’s rule.

4.7. Noor (Ansari)

Changes in the labour market over the last twenty years or so include the development of a market at Ujarnath; brick kilns; emergence of casual works like construction of roads and drains (reference to MGNREGA projects) as sources of employment, though with the exception of four women, no other woman from the village does such

work; not only can people afford to construct proper houses but they also tile the floors and walls and even use stone grinding machines. Only those who are involved in such work, benefit from these alternate work opportunities. Female labour has not been advantaged. In case of brick kiln work, at the start of the season, the '*munshi*' (clerk/accountant) of the kiln comes to the village. He is already familiar with those who do such work and asks them to return to work. Some people may ask for an advance of five hundred or one thousand rupees which are later adjusted against their wages. In the off-season as well, those who regularly work at kilns, take credit which is adjusted against their labour in the season.

Migration can be traced back to many decades, but it has really picked up in the last decade. Migration has become a fashionable trend. Villagers migrate to provide for the households. Also, if they migrate, there is a greater possibility of saving some money, whereas, in villages whatever little is earned is spent. Contractors enquire about labour recruitment possibilities from the labourers already working with them. Contractors from Chandigarh, Lucknow, Kanpur, Hyderabad etc come to the village and stay here for few days to recruit labour. Labourers ask about the type of work, wages, accommodation, food and so on. '*Labour do-chaar din mein thekedar ko jaan jata hain*', meaning that within these few days, labourers can assess contractors. Those who agree to work for the contractor are given some advance for transport expenses which is later adjusted against their wages.

Rice, wheat and sugarcane are the predominant crops and some may grow corn as well for self-consumption. Those with larger landholdings like the *pradhan*, cultivate sugarcane. Otherwise, most villagers cultivate wheat and rice to provide for household consumption. Sugarcane also takes too long to grow. Rice and wheat harvesting is completely mechanised among the *badkas*. In some villages, as in Sapahi Khas, some area may be manually harvested and threshed because the straw is used as fodder for animals. This is not the case in Bhaisaha where the *badkas* buy straw. Mechanisation has resulted in declined agricultural employment. Both male and female labour is adversely impacted by this, but perhaps, female labour more than male labour. Men can migrate out to work even though remittances are irregular and low. Women have to work much more. Parveen adds that in times of need and

urgency, they incur debt from various sources to run the household, manage agriculture and bring up the children.

Earlier agriculture was dependent on rainfall. Water continues to be a problem even now. Rice and wheat crops dry. The canal is dry and providing water for livestock is difficult. They do not use hand-pumps for animals but only for the household members. Animals are dependent on drain water or any other source. Some even die.

Though yields have increased and better quality seeds are now available as also water and fertilizer, the cost of farming has increased. There is no profit.

Over the past fifteen to twenty years, many villagers have become involved in livestock rearing. For the first time, Noor has kept few goats which will be sold on '*bakreed*' (a Muslim festival where goats are sacrificed) for anything ranging from two thousand to five thousand rupees, depending upon their quality.

Since at least her marriage about twenty years previously, Noor has not come across any instance of bonded labour in the village.

Noor's mother-in-law owns about one *beegha* land. With the exception of seventeen *kathas*, remaining land has been rented out to shopkeepers in Ujarnath market at the village junction. The rent is taken by the mother-in-law and is not distributed among her three sons. The three brothers cultivate the seventeen *katha* and the produce is equally divided among them and the mother who lives and leads an independent life. About six months previously, Noor and her husband incurred a debt of one lakh and thirty thousand rupees from one household for the purchase of about four *katha* land in Noor's name. All formalities and transactions were conducted by her husband. It is generally the case that on an amount less than five thousand rupees, debtors have to pay an interest of ten rupees on every hundred rupees every month; when the debt amount is more than this, an interest of five rupees is charged and in cases where the debt amount is more than fifty thousand rupees, an interest of four rupees is charged. Where land has been mortgaged, no interest is charged. Noor is charged an interest of five rupees on every hundred rupees per month. They could not approach banks because they did not own any asset which could have possibly been mortgaged. The

field has not been officially divided and transferred in the names of her mother-in-law's sons. They have invested in land, because they could not produce enough to feed their household on the existing land. They might still not produce enough to suffice the household, but it would be more than before.

To irrigate their land, they hire a pump-set at hundred rupees per hour and pipe at fifty rupees per hour. The government has provided a scheme wherein the harijans can get boring in their fields on a discounted rate. However, the *pradhan* of this village has not provided this facility to anyone. Villagers have not asked for it as well. '*Pradhan tang karte hain*' i.e. the *pradhan* hassles and creates difficulties. He controls everything. The *pradhan*'s fields border Noor's (their houses are neighbouring as well) and he does not allow the latter to take her goats there for grazing. A dirt road led to these fields but this has been taken over by the *pradhan* as a part of his field and sugarcane is grown here. The *pradhan* is also known to have threatened them with cutting off their access to their fields. Noor asserts that one cannot be silent (passive) all the time. Noor now takes her goats alongside the road for grazing where neither *chutkas* nor *badkas* can complain, though those whose field borders the road may do so.

Noor's husband, Aas Mohammad Ansari, migrated to Saudi about six years previously. He is involved in various types of casual work including construction, painting, flooring etc. Presently he owns a small tailoring shop which he operates at night and during the day he works in a cloth store. He is able to send home between ten thousand and fifteen thousand rupees once every two to three months. He had come to know of the possibility of working in Saudi through someone else already working there. Passport and visa formalities were accomplished through an agent. Prior to this, he worked for a tailoring shop in the neighbouring block of Faajilnagar for ten years. He also participated in own agriculture.

Till about two years ago, Noor undertook agricultural wage labour. She did wage labour for the *Pradhan* only who is the major source of employer in the village and owns so much land that labour from other villages come to work on his fields. Now he taunts then that since Noor's family has money, they need not do wage labour. Noor did not do wage labour for anyone else, because the *pradhan* is the largest

source of employment and no one else could provide as much employment. The other bhumihars live in other parts of the village and hire labour from there. The pradhan hires labour from among the dhobis and Kamkars who live nearby. Noor is critical of the pradhan and explains that he thinks that they have so much money but do not think of the expenses involved. If she goes to his house to ask for even few chillies, she is told to purchase it from Ujarnath (Parveen sympathises with her that this must be very humiliating- '*batai, kitna laaj lagat hui.*') So now she purchases everything from Ujarnath, even if it has to be on credit. Over the last two to three months she has bought stuff worth five to six thousand rupees but has not yet paid. No interest is charges on this type of credit. In the past, Noor has borrowed money to pay for her children's school fees and to invest in agriculture.

Previously, she did unpaid labour within the pradhan's house, but not any longer. Because of her caste (or religion?), she did not undertake work such as washing utensils or cooking which would bring her in direct touch with their possessions. Noor would be called upon for tasks like scooping the wheat or rice to separate the chaff from the grain. However, on religious functions like Ramnavi, she was asked to make a mud stove and on these rare occasions, she is allowed to touch few utensils. Noor says that she hesitates and even feels shy to sit alongside them because they are *badkas*. If she is called upon for some work by the pradhan's house, Noor does not outright decline but forwards excuses such as her keeping unwell. They have to 'respect' the pradhan because they have to cross his fields to reach theirs.

Till few years before, the badkas paid twelve rupees, this increased to fifteen rupees and now they pay twenty rupees. The chutka employers pay approximately twenty-five rupees. A sarcastic Noor comments that badkas like the pradhan pay less because they are 'dhani-mani' (rich).

Wage determination of different tasks is attributed to gender and the physical labour involved in specific tasks. According to Noor, '*hum mard hai, kudari chalate hai, aurat kam mehnat ka kaam karti hai*', meaning that men undertake spade work and the tasks performed by women involve less hard-work and labour.

Employers call upon labourers personally and inform them about the work to be done and the wages. One labourer may be asked to organise labour who then calls upon familiar labourers and those capable of doing the work. Some face to face haggling is involved. Demands for wage increase are modelled along the lines of increasing food costs. Labourers interact with each other and decide that they will go for work only if they are paid the desired wage. Employers may refuse and try to arrange labour from another village, but they have to supply this labour with good food and '*bidis*'. If employers cannot secure labour from elsewhere, they again approach own village labour and agree to increase their wage. Wages are supposed to be paid at the completion of work, but delayed wage payment is common. In contract work, in principle equal wages are to be paid to all labourers. However, often there are fights and arguments over children being paid less than the other adult labourers or fights between the labourers and contractors over delayed wage payment.

In contract work, the contract itself acts as a source of labour control. Labour attempts to finish as soon as possible so that they can get wages as soon as possible. In these cases, the employer does not supervise. In daily wage work, labour works slowly and tries to draw it out for another day or so. In these cases, the employer is present at the field to supervise and keeps shouting at them for sitting, talking and deliberately not working properly. The employer is liable to pay for as many days as it takes to complete the work. At times, a fight ensues and if the employer hassles labour a lot, the latter deliberately do poor quality work and instead of weeding, labour just snatches some handfuls of grass and crushes the rest down with their feet ('*nauch kar, laat maar kar, chale aate*').

The *badkas* have larger landholdings and therefore provide more employment than the *chutkas*. But, the latter pay higher and timely wages.

Exchange relations among labour are common where rice and wheat harvesting and threshing is concerned. These are usually organised along hamlet lines.

Noor's husband tells her how to spend the money and helps in own agriculture when at home, though Noor asserts that she knows more about farming than him.

According to Noor, people like Parveen (implying dalits) vote for Mayawati. With the exception of Ahirs, Bhumihars and Rajputs, all vote for Mayawati. She votes according to her personal likes and whoever seems to be winning. Though certain people might try to intimidate villagers into voting for a particular party, not everyone is scared. Noor recognises Mayawati from posters she has seen. She believes that a Muslim government can never be formed and opines that if Sonia's (reference to Sonia Gandhi and the Congress Party) government is not formed, then it will be even worse i.e. '*agar Sonia ka sarkar nahi raha to duniya mein aur aag lagi.*' Noor also comments on the statues installed in the capital city by the Mayawati government, queries about Kanshi Ram. Political parties send individuals to villages for purposes of propaganda. For example, for Mayawati's party, someone from Karmani comes on a tractor-trolley. Such a person is paid hundred rupees per day. They also supply the pradhan with alcohol for distribution among his main people as a way of vote lobbying.

Though the present pradhan's term is over, he was granted a six month extension and he had to bribe for this. '*Khilane ke liye pradhan ke ghar par bakra kat ta*', meaning, that as a way of bribing appropriate authorities, a feast was held at the pradhan's house where goat meat was served.

The Mayawati government has benefited the harijans a lot. Oncem from *cham toli* two car loads of people went to Deoria where they stayed in a hotel free of cost, they were given blankets and saris. Both, men and women had gone. Dhobis and Kamkars also do not fear the *badkas* and they even abuse *badkas* just as the latter abuse them.

According to Noor, with the exception of these few houses (reference to Ansari households), both men and women consume alcohol. This is procured by men from a kiln at Ujarnath and they share it with the women and children of the house who even lick the bottle cap ('*dhakkan chaat kar rahe jaate hain*').

Education in villages is different. In public schools, the teachers come to school but are engaged in their personal work. They are not bothered with what the children do or where they go, whereas, in private schools the teachers pay close attention to the students. In the former, kids only play and fight amongst themselves. Even when

inspection takes place in public schools, the inspectors call before hand, so everything is pre-arranged for their visit.

4.8. Rekha and Ramdas (Dhobi couple)

Spatial organisation of the village follows caste lines as people settled wherever they got land. As the Chamars skinned dead animals, they lived outside the village so that the smell would not permeate the village interiors. While caste based discriminatory practises have mostly ended, *chutkas* will still not sit alongside the *badkas*.

Under colonialism, when *lagan* (tax) was charged and the poor could not pay this, the *badkas* or the *pradhan* would pay on their behalf. In return, the poor gave their land to them. Ramdas's ancestors had lost some land in this manner. Rekha's father-in-law owned approximately fifteen *katha* land. Of this about three *katha* was lost in *chak* which happened about twenty-three or twenty-four years before. The remaining twelve *katha*, fragmented into three plots, was divided among his four sons. Ramdas inherited about three and a half *katha*. This land in his name. They have leased out ten *kathas* from another villager. They have sown wheat on it. The lessor does not allow them to cultivate sugarcane on it, because it is a source of money. Says Ramdas, '*aankh lagi.*' All investments in the leased land are made by the lessee and the produce is equally shared with the lessor.

Canal was introduced approximately thirty years or so previously and this water is sourced from some river in Nepal. However, since two years, it has been dry. Those who could afford to, have relied on tubewell irrigation. For those who do not have a boring in their own field or whose field is not close enough to use another's, agriculture is rainfed. Rekha and Ramdas irrigate their owned land through canal water, but the canal has now been dry for some time. In this case agriculture is rainfed. This is why wheat dries. The leased land is tubewell irrigated. Since there is no boring in that field, they use another's and hire a pump-set at the rate of hundred rupees per hour. According to Ramdas, to apply for boring to be done in their field under a government scheme for harijans, some papers are required which are with the *lekhpal* (a clerk dealing with land records). The *lekhpal* refuses to give these to Ramdas unless he pays him fifty rupees.

The use of fertilizers has been in vogue since about fifteen years. Before this only the *badkas* could to buy fertilizer. With the availability and application of fertilizer and water, the yields have increased now. Now *Badkas* do not allow villagers to take livestock in their fields for grazing. Once Rekha and Ramdas's goat had wandered into a *badka's* field and they had it taken away to some place in the neighbouring block of Faazilnagar. They had to pay for the release of their goat. *Badkas* are known to have threatened villagers and sent individuals to jail for this. Since that incident, Ramdas and Rekha do not keep goats, but have a buffalo. They take it to alongside the road for grazing and always keep a tight hold of the leash.

Combines were first used in the village about fifteen to twenty years earlier. Before this, harvesting and threshing of rice and wheat was manually done and delivered at the employer's house where it used to be stored on the roof. For every twenty *bhojas* harvested and threshed, labourers were remunerated with one *bhoja*. It took about five days to do twenty *bhojas*. The entire village would work in the *badka's* fields on a regular basis for two to three months. Preparing the field for the plantation of rice is done by tractors and now there is not much need of *sohini*. Rice and wheat are grown for household consumption and over the last thirty years sugarcane is cultivated as a major cash crop. Sugarcane is a long-term crop and does not require plantation every season. This has again contributed to declining availability of agricultural employment. While earlier labourers could get up to two months of wage labour in the *rupani* season, now they get age labour for only about twenty days. Sugarcane harvesting is done on '*geda*' and not wage labour, with the few exception where there are not much leaves. Women do not cut sugarcane.

There have been several developments in the labour market. But neither Ramdas nor Rekha are involved in any of these as the *pradhan* is associated with most of these in some way. They are not active and mobile in seeking wage labour, rather, only go when some one calls upon them for work. According to Ramdas, '*dehaat, dehaat hai aur shahar, shahar hain.*' In villages, going out in search for work is associated with '*sharm*'. In contrast, in towns like Kasiya, Gorakhpur or Lucknow, this would not be the case.

Neither Rekha nor Ramdas work at brick kilns. Both claim that they would not be able to do such work. Some men from the village work at kilns. They carry loads of bricks on their cycles. The incoming female labour from Ranchi carries headloads of bricks. Recruitment for brick kilns is debt based. The owners of kilns maintain a record of those who work at their kiln, advance them credit of two thousand to four thousand rupees so that in season these labourers do not join any other kiln. This advance is adjusted against their wages in the season. Labourers are able to earn over and above this.

Out migration of labour has a long history. In recent decades there has been an increase in migration because population pressure has meant that people do not have substantial land or farming and therefore need to migrate to earn. Villagers migrate with friends, relatives, colleagues who may have already been working as migrants and help villagers in securing work and better wages. When one migrates, they are not engaged in day to day survival of the households, migrants even go hungry to save and send money home. Otherwise, in villages whatever is earned is spent on daily expenses. MGNREGA has not had any impact on the extent of migration because work provided is irregular and for a short duration. Ramdas does not migrate because no one else is available in the house to work in his absence.

Alternative sources of employment have only benefited those who are engaged in them. Rekha and Ramdas have not benefited from these. Both use to work as *dhobis* till about ten years previously. They would be remunerated in kind for this type of work. About nine kilos of rice was given by each customer every six months or so. Clothes were washed at a *dhobi ghaat* which was later acquired by the then pradhan. In addition to land dispossession, they have no access to water as the village pond is dry. People are more fancy and conscious now. Earlier people would bathe when the *dhobi* returned clean clothes, now they bathe everyday. Surf (detergent) is widely available. People wear synthetic clothes which are easy to wash. Women would wear shirt style blouses.

Consumerism has taken a deep hold. Earlier students would walk long distances to school, but now even if the school is in the village, they want cycles. Even then they attend schools irregularly. In public schools, teachers only come for their attendance,

and mostly they put their feet on the desk and sleep. Teachers, in collaboration with the pradhan and *aanganbadi* workers, sell the ration which comes to the school for mid-day meals. Ramdas comments that if they could meet officers who come for school inspections, they would complain, but villagers are out working mostly. They do not go to block to lodge a complaint because they would rather save the ten rupees travel money and buy food for children. In private schools, teaching is much better, but it is expensive. While earlier even those who passed with a second division could secure jobs, now even those holding B.A. and M.A. degrees cannot find employment.

There are no '*bandhaks*' (bonded labourers) in the village. Instances of these could be found three to four decades ago, but not now. Now people are clever and no one will submit to such a relationship or work only for food. '*Bandhako ko khilaate-khilaate kitno ka khet apne naam kar liya.*' This is why *badkas* own so much land today. There is *begari* however. Rekha and Ramdas provided unpaid labour service to the present pradhan-they tended to his livestock, made cow dung cakes, swept the areas outside their house, scooped rice and wheat etc. Now they do not even go his place on weddings and such occasions. Many others do *begari* because of fear. Rekha tells the *chatt* story to support this. Earlier people would be scared and hide in their huts on seeing the police. The administration was different then. But now as people gain education, they become intelligent. They are not scared of the police now and tell whatever they know.

Rekha and Ramdas have incurred debts at times for purposes such as weddings. The general rule is that debtors are charged an interest of ten rupees on every hundred rupees per month. They also buy utilities from a general store on credit. They do not approach banks for loans as this is time-consuming, cannot afford to pay bribes and officers do not sign relevant papers without money. They also fear the consequences as some who had taken loans from banks lost land because of their inability to repay. Though the government provides relief (eg, in purchase of fertilizers or relief on tractor loans etc), the banks 'eat it all up.'

According to them, the pradhan owns at least hundred acres of land. But they never tell anyone. His fields surround the entire village and the next one as well. At the time of '*chak*' and '*aabaadi*', when all *badkas* had to give part of their, the present

pradhan's family did not give any land. They even claimed part of the Gram Sabha land as their own. This is why this family does not get along well the pradhan's family now. Otherwise, earlier, Rekha undertook wage labour in their fields and was also extensively involved in unpaid labour services in their house. It has been ten years approximately since Rekha stopped doing wage labour in the present pradhan's fields. She continues to do wage labour for others.

Rekha only does wage labour in agricultural tasks such as weeding and sowing and not spade or any other work that involves mud (reference to lifting headloads of mud or bricks or moulding bricks). The latter are male tasks. Ramdas laughs off the sexual division of labour by saying that God made it this way. Rekha admits that when male members of the family are not available, she does spade work in her own field, but never as wage labour. She elaborates that spade work is a male task and she would feel self-conscious and apprehensive in doing it. Women do weeding and sowing. Apart from agricultural wage labour, Ramdas owns a large speaker which he had purchased on a loan about two decades previously. Using a battery, he plays music on it on special occasions. For this, he is paid about fifty rupees per hour. But his work is very irregular, may get it once in two or three months.

Employers may individually call upon one labour with who they share close socio-economic ties ('vyvhaaar') or is a regular worker for them. This labourer is asked to organise two or three or as many labourers as needed for a specific task. This labourers, in effect, becomes the *thekedar*. The landowner has prior knowledge about who to approach for what work because of socio-economic familiarity with the village classes of labour and because the same people have been working for them over the years. The contractor also knows who to approach because he or she works with them. Rekha undertakes wage labour in other villages as well, but always in a group of women and perhaps, few men as well, from own village. She never works alongside men from another village.

The going seasonal wage rate is paid. The rate set at the start of the season, remains throughout the season. When the employer calls upon a labourer, some haggling still takes place. Labourers argue with prospective employers or contractors that because everything in the shops has become so expensive, their wages should also increase.

Any one labourer who has a sharp mind and can speak up may take the initiative to demand higher wages. Labourers spread, by word of mouth, the wages to be demanded and decide among themselves that they will not go for work, unless this is agreed. If the wage offered by the landowner is too less, not enough to provide for food, labourers refuse the job. Employers may hire labour from outside the village, but there is no friction between own village labourers and these. However, after a while, some of the local labour will return to work for the lower wages. At times, a low-caste employer may increase the wage and consequently the other employers will have to offer same wages. In demanding wage hikes, labourers may present a unified stand against lower-caste employers. This is not the case vis-à-vis *badka* employers and anyways they would not increase wages because '*unka roj-roj ka kaam hai*'.

Contracted work such as in the case of spade work or unskilled construction labour, the contractor earns slightly more than the labourers. Ramdas explains that when he does spade work, the contractor deducts two or three rupees from the wages of labourers as his commission. When prodded as to why he and other labourers do not object, Ramdas philosophically questions that one who does not give the due wages of his own will, is not likely to give even if labourers fight with him over it, '*jo apne man se nahi deta woh ladne se dega kya?*' the contractor threatens labourers that he will not take them for wage labour next time. In contract work, wages are paid timely at the completion of the work. In *hajari* or daily wage work, payments are more often than not delayed. Employers say that they do not have cash at home, have to go to the bank etc and they pay several days after the completion of the work.

In daily wage work, the employer supervises the labour and therefore labour cannot deliberately prolong work. In contract work, there is no direct supervision.

Lower caste employers pay slightly higher wages so that labour completed work timely. They are more likely to pay on time as they think that if labourers are paid on time, they can buy something and feed their family in the evening. On the other hand, the *badkas* think that labour can fast today and wages can be paid tomorrow when they get cash from the bank. Parveen adds that another difference, is that labour can fight and verbally abuse lower-caste employers, but not the upper-caste employers.

Exchange labour relations are common among labour. These are not necessarily organised along caste lines.

Even though labour or lower-castes are numerically dominant, they do not present a unified stand on common problems relating to ration or job cards. People do what they think is correct. It is common for people to lie and embroil others in some petty dispute, in showing off their importance. The pradhan or members of his house do not mix extensively with the villagers socially, nonetheless, they are fed all types of information by villagers who have their own agendas. They are served tea when they go to his house. This is how the pradhan comes to know of everything. As the pradhan's fields borders those of many villagers, there is always the fear of repercussions such as the pradhan cutting off their access to his fields for grazing livestock, for defecation or create problems for labour in accessing their own fields.

A lower caste pradhan may do more than *badkas*. But when Jairam (chamar) was the pradhan, he did not do anything. Ramdas mocks that, '*seekhte-seekhte rajneeti, pura paanch saal nikal gaya*', i.e. he whiled away the entire five year terms in learning politics. The *badkas* do not need to learn anything. According to Ramdas, '*election mein faayda kya, ghar-ghar sharab ki ek bottle pahauch jaati hain*', 'what is the benefit from elections, that one alcohol bottle is delivered in every house'. People even sell their votes.

The government has initiated many schemes and provides a lot, but middlemen take everything. A former lower-caste pradhan and the present pradhan transferred *banjar* land in the name of their wives. On this matter, few months previously, a doctor from the neighbouring village of Jawar had filed a complaint against the present pradhan. The pradhan had to bribe the SDM to suppress the matter. When a dirt road was being made as a part of the MGNREGA work project, the pradhan gave the labourers eighty rupees only instead of the stipulated hundred rupees. When checking happened, labourers lied that they got hundred rupees. But his winter the same thing happened again and a labourer, who was not aware that the person questioning was an officer, lied that they received eighty rupee wages. The pradhan again had to bribe several concerned authorities. Since then, this labourer has not been included in MGNREGA projects. However, the pradhan now does give the stipulated wages of hundred

rupees. Still, there is scope for corruption. Where his 'main' people (reference to his loyalists, 'clients' or possibly even those in neo-bondage) are concerned, he makes false entries in their job cards i.e. for more days than they have actually worked. When money is credited in the accounts of these 'main' people, it is collected and shared with the *pradhan*. Those who favour the *pradhan* get all benefits, others get nothing. In public schools, mid-day meal is served only once a week rather than everyday. The government has provided for a salary of one thousand rupees per month for the school cook, but the *pradhan* gives only five hundred rupees per month.

Under the Mayawati rule, police is more accessible to the labourers and lower castes. The police reports complaints and takes action on them. Ramdas comments that had it not been for Mayawati, the *badkas*, would have made juice out of them and drank it. Muslims vote for the cycle (reference to symbols of various political parties); *bhumihars*, Rajputs and Brahmins vote for *panja* (hand, Congress) or *kamal* (lotus, BJP) and the *harijans* vote for *haathi* (elephant, BSP). They even put Mayawati's party flag on their house sometimes. Ramdas elaborates that earlier *harijans* voted for the congress party because all castes were equal under her Indira Gandhi rule, but now everyone follows their caste only. Under Mayawati's government, a benefit accruing to labour is that under the influence of MGNREGA wages, other employers have also had to increase wages to hundred rupees. Mayawati has made one mistake. She increased the price of sugarcane. Only *badkas* cultivate sugarcane and so benefit from it. *Chutkas* grow rice and wheat for self-consumption. Consequently, the prices of sugar and fertilizer will also increase.

Women do not attend panchayat meetings.

4.9. Panna (Dhobi)

Regarding the spatial organisation of the village, Panna is of the view that villagers settled wherever they had land. *Chua-chut* i.e. caste based discriminatory practices such as Dhobis not eating at Chamars house and vice-versa and Ahirs not touching the utensils of Dusadhs, Dhobis or Kamkars continue. Earlier, in grinding grain, if the 'chura' was touched by the labourer, it was given away. Not now. There is no *chua-chat* when grain is given at mills for grinding. The younger generation does not

follow the old practices much and they eat anywhere. Irrespective of caste, cleanliness is desired by all.

More than two decades ago, crops cultivated included '*madua, kadu, tangani, macca*' and not so much rice and wheat. Irrigation was a problem. That is why these crops were cultivated. Earlier, *badkas* with large fields would grow rice and wheat and even though the yield was less than what it is now, it was still considerable at that point of time. With the exception of rice and wheat, other crops are no longer cultivated. The shifts in cropping patterns are more than twenty years old. The older crops can no longer be cultivated because of land marginalisation and changing tastes of the people. Canal and tube well irrigation are common now. The canal is dry though.

Since the *badkas* started using combines for harvesting, not much wage labour is available in *katni*. As cash was not very common, wages were paid in kind. *Badkas* have large family and they want to save grain for household consumption and if they have a surplus, they prefer to sell it. When harvesting was manual, she could earn up to ten *bhojas*. Now men migrate out to earn and they have to live on that. *Chutka* employers themselves do *katni* manually. These would undertake wage labour in harvesting in *badkas* fields but now that they do not, they are concerned with saving money and therefore, do *katni* themselves. They would rather spend the saved money on food and not labour wages. Now those who have a little more than ten *kathas*, may hire labour. These are placed slightly lower than '*babu log*' (reference to *badkas*). Wages for *katni* are paid in cash and not in kind. '*Ab to aur bhi garj, aur fashion ho gaya*'. It was better when wages were paid in kind. Labourers would bring the grain to their homes, grind it and eat it for two days. Now they get cash wage, go to the market to purchase something and the money is all consumed. Parveen adds that in this children also want money to buy toffee, pen etc, but if grain was received, this would not be the case. In comparison to before, less wage labour is available in *sohini* also. *Badkas* spray pesticide, the grass dries. Only in conditions of moisture, will grass grow and there will be need for weeding. Decline in the availability of agricultural employment has led to '*khaane ki pareshani, paise ki pareshani*' i.e. worrying over the availability of food and money.

Male out-migration has increased the responsibility of women vis-à-vis own agriculture. Panna has to do all agricultural work by herself, hire a tractor for ploughing her field etc. Her husband, who operates a rice mill at home, helps out when he can. When he is not available, not only Panna has to do spade work in her field, but also harvest sugarcane and help loading it. But in *badka's* fields she does not cut the sugarcane, only takes the leaves out because this is what women do. Sushils says that she will not be physically able to cut sugarcane in *badka's* fields. *Chilni* or taking the leaves out is paid less than the cutting of sugarcane. Panna's son was a migrant worker in Delhi but returned because he did not like it there. Since two years, he has been operating a tiny egg stall in the market at the village junction. Migration has provided relief to people in terms of food and clothes.

There are no *bandhaks* in the village. No one in the village will work in exchange for food because a labourer has to feed more than just himself and money is needed for other expenses. Panna provides unpaid labour services to the *pradhan's* house, for example, scooping, tending to livestock, storing wheat etc. She does this because of '*vyvhaar*'. If she was to refuse, they would be annoyed and taunt her that her family is rich, they think of themselves as *badkas*.

Apart from the development of irrigation facilities and the introduction of mechanisation, the last two decades or so have seen the coming up of brick kilns and various types of non-agricultural casual labour jobs such as in construction, MGNREGA etc. Female labour has not benefited from these opportunities of wage labour. No one from this village works in kilns because they cannot do such intense physical labour. They feel shy, for what if a relative saw them moulding bricks while their husbands sit at home. *Ranchinis* (reference to incoming female migrant labour from Ranchi, don't feel shy because this work is done by their caste group. If Panna was to wash others clothes, no one would remark on it because her caste does this work. But if Parveen was to do it, it would be perceived as a matter of '*sharm, laaj*'. Rather than working in kilns, it is better to incur debt and sit idle at home.

According to Panna, her in-laws earlier lived in another village, Naraha, where they owned land as well. This was sold and her in-laws moved to Bhaisaha. Here they owned twenty-four *kathas*, fragmented into three different plots. Her husband

inherited four *kathas*. Panna cultivates only rice and wheat. If she were to grow sugarcane on half of her field, the produce would not even be a trolley load. This would hardly generate any profit. Sugarcane takes long to grow whereas she can cultivate wheat for two seasons. As there is no boring in her field, they use another's and hire a pump-set at hundred rupees per hour. Since they do not own an engine, they did not apply for the public scheme that provided discounted boring for harijans.

Since last year, Panna's family has leased in land of a *mian* (Muslim) from another village. The latter borrowed money from them against his land to meet the expenses of his son's wedding. On these seven *kathas*, they may cultivate rice, wheat or sugarcane. All investments are made by Panna's family and they are entitled to the entire produce.

Panna has been working as an agricultural wage labour since fifteen to twenty years. Her daughter-in-law does not do wage labour because Panna and other family members can still work and provide for the household. Panna cannot do very laborious work now. She tires easily, even when she has to carry two head loads of mud from the field to the house and has to hire a trolley. She uses cowdung as fertilizer in her field. She does wage labour in other villages as well, but only in the company of other women.

Ten years ago, they opened a rice mill. For this purpose loan was taken from a bank against the machinery equipment. The loan has been repaid. Rice mill was opened due to the lack of employment. They could not earn enough to ensure household food security. Panna helps out in mill work.

As of now, Panna's family is not indebted, with the exception of buying utilities and other household goods on credit from a village general store.

Wages for specific tasks are determined depending upon the physical labour involved. Poor employers think that if they pay higher wages, their work will be done on time. The *badkas* rationalise that if they pay higher wages, labourers would ask for a further increase. They would rather pay less, even if their work takes longer to complete.

A landowner or his servant, whether from own or another village, calls upon labour's house. He may individually call upon labourers or ask one to organise labour for the specified job. Whenever Panna has been asked to organise labour, she contacts those who work fast, who are '*aapan*' (i.e. our's, implying labourers with similar caste-class background, from one's circle of friends and relatives, from own hamlet etc). In recruiting them, her rationale is that she would be helping those earn money so that they can feed their family ('*do paisa voh bhi kama le to uska ghar bhi kha le*'). A labour group may include both men and women, labourers from this and other village.

When the landowner calls at her house to recruit, she tells him that labour will work for a certain specified wage, that they will work only with labourers from own village because otherwise there is fighting. Demands for higher wages are based on the need for money to buy food and clothes. If employers do not agree, labour is reluctant to work for him the next time. They would sarcastically tell the employer to go to the same labourers who had previously done their work. Later on, the employer will have to increase the wage. Employers from other villages pay higher wages because labourers have to travel some distance for work. Own village employers are likely to pay less, because they hire labour on a comparatively more regular basis. Panna and other labourers are paid the same wage. Whether labour is from this or other village, they are paid similar wages. But even if women were to do male, they would not be remunerated at the same wage rate as male labour is. Female labour mostly works on daily wages and not contract. Employers from other villages generally pay on time, at the completion of work. They give the wages to any one labourer and ask her to distribute among the labourers. Employers from this village pay three or four days after the work has been done. Labourers may also not ask for wages immediately after the completion of the work because they think that this way they will save some money. If they get paid that day itself, the wage is likely to be spent on the day's expenses. Labourers may individually and directly approach the employer for wages or few labourers may together approach the employer.

When a *badka* employer is not present at the field for supervision, labour works slowly, takes rests. They try to draw out the work. But if the employer is present for supervision, then foot dragging is not possible. If labour is working properly but still

the employer keeps hollering at them, they deliberately continue weeding the same spot and laugh it off by saying that labour is in any case infamous.

Panna would first work for a *badka* (reference to the *pradhan*) employer because she lives near his house, his fields surround the village and she has to go through them for any thing. Money is not the most important criteria. A *chutka* employer can be patient, but *badka* is easily annoyed and angered.

Exchange labour relations are common and these are primarily organised along caste and hamlet lines.

Those who own large landholdings, have below poverty line ration cards and are given *Awaas* money. The poor get nothing. The government provides many benefits for the poor, but middlemen corner these. '*Ghoos ka jamana hai*', i.e. bribery is a common practice. Irrespective of their castes, *pradhans* are motivated by self-interest only. The *pradhan* before the present one was a *chutka*. He was allocating *abaadi* land to the poor, but he was pressured by the *badkas* who opposed his decision and embroiled him in legal issues. The politics of *badkas* centre on keeping the *chutkas* subjected. They do not like the *chutkas* to get food, clothes, be educated or get better employment, so that *chutkas* do the work of *badkas*. The *chutkas* live in fear of *badkas* because their children may cut sugarcane from *badkas* fields or their livestock may wander in their fields. The Mayawati government has put *badkas* on the backfoot. If they say anything, they can be blamed under the SC/ST Atrocities Act (popularly called the *harijan* by the villagers). Once the *pradhan* had wrongly accused her of cutting some crop from his field and she reported him at the police station under *harijan*. But he was let go.

Panna does not attend panchayats. She claims that in her *biradri* people live in harmony with each other.

There appears to be a lot of tension within Panna's household. Her husband and sons drink alcohol a lot. Panna's daughter-in-law is crying whe nshse tells us that she has given some clothes for stitching, but she is not given any money to get them. She is not given any money to buy household goods such as detergent also. She takes money

from her husband or father-in-law's trouser's when no one is watching. Throughout this interview, Panna was carrying loads of cow dung cake to store them at some place. Her husband did not help her. The daughter-in-law (smiling) explains that it would touch his hands if he helped.

4.10. Sushma and Hema (Chamar)

Spatial organisation of the village follows caste lines because of '*chua-chaat*'. Caste based discriminatory practices are still followed by *badaks*, *koeiris*, *lohars* etc. They do not touch *harijans* utensils or eat with them. Earlier, *chutkas* would not sit with *badkas*. But this is not so strict now. *Chutkas* can make '*surti*' (tobacco) and give to *badkas*. According to Teels, '*bhagwan ke ghar se sab ek raaste se aate hain...dharti par geda lag jaata hai.*'

More than two decades ago, whether *badka* or *chutka*, all cultivated '*kadu, maccai*' etc because there was no fertilizer or water. Cowdung was used as fertilizer. Rice and wheat cultivation became common only after canal was built. Tubewell irrigation is much more recent. Now earlier crops are not cultivated because no one would eat them. Farming has become costlier. Fertilizer is expensive. Only *babu log* profit who sell sugarcane worth two to three lakhs. The poor cultivate sugarcane on a much smaller scale, earn very little from its sale.

The *badkas* hire combines for harvesting, whereas, earlier labour would be hired to do it manually. Other landowners harvest manually themselves. According to Sushma's daughter-in-law, more wage labour is available in weeding now because the usage of pesticides has increased grass growth. More wage labour is available in rice sowing. Earlier wages were paid in kind. The grains received as wage was consumed over the next four days by the whole family. Now '*babu log*' give twenty-two rupees for work done till evening. What can one get in twenty-two rupees? Rice costs sixteen rupees per kilo? How will four people eat? Decline in the availability of agricultural wage labour has caused problems for the '*guardian*' (term used to refer to husbands or male head of the household) who has to migrate to earn and provide for the family.

In recent years, casual labour in construction, roofing, road/mud work (reference to MGNREGA work projects) has emerged as new sources of employment. Women cannot do casual labour like carrying headloads of mud or bricks because their head hurts. One would fall sick in just travelling from one village to another. Even if they have nothing to do or eat, they would rather sleep at home. These developments in the labour market mean that greater employment is available now. When work is available, labourers go for work and earn hundred rupees. Men have benefited from these opportunities. Men earn and buy food with wages, so women also benefit.

The trend of migration is at least thirty years old, but it has picked up over the last twenty years. This is because of the lack of employment in the village. When people migrate, they can save and send money home. In the village, wages are used up in daily expenses and it is not possible to save. In the early years of migration when migrants would send five hundred rupees, villagers would think that a lot of money has come or when one's son-in-law would ride a bicycle or wear socks, villagers would be curious to see who has come. Earlier people were illiterate, they were not intelligent but now people are comparatively more educated and clever. [Another woman laments (pointing towards her grandson) that if she says anything to her grandson, he immediately relies back]. As a migrant worker, Sushma's son use to work in a bag stitching company but he left this because it caused itching and now works in a shipyard in Gujarat. When Sushma's son sends remittances, it is used for expenses like health. When he is at home, he buys and stores all household goods-food, clothes etc. If anyone working with him is returning to the village, he sends things like detergent with him. Many people from the neighbouring village of Dudhahi are working at the same place as Sushma's son. Neither Sushma, nor her daughter-in-law go to the market. If they need to go to the market to buy green vegetables or give rice or wheat at the mill for grinding, Sushma does this.

Sushma's family has about ten *katha* land. It is in her son's name. They had more land, but about three *katha* was mortgaged a couple of years back to finance her daughter-in-law's operation. No interest is charged on this loan. They built their house in another four *kathas*. (Previously, they use to live opposite to their current location, but twenty years previously they shifted to the field because in that house Sushma's children died). The ten *katha* that is cultivated is fragmented into two plots. In her

field, there is boring for tubewell. This was done under a government scheme and she had to pay only five hundred rupees. To irrigate her field, Sushma hires an engine at hundred rupees per hour and a pipe at sixty rupees per hour. They cannot save and spare that much amount to buy an engine and pipe. [Few other women present laugh and suggest that I should buy them one. When I joke that I will ask the *pradhan*, they laugh and one commented that '*voh to apna hi jodte hain, unko kam ho jaayega*', meaning that the *pradhan* only accumulates for himself and if he buys an engine and pipe for labourers, he will fall short of money!]. Sushma use to cultivate sugarcane on the land which has been mortgaged. The produce would be about two trolley's and was sold at a mill. Approximately four thousand rupees could be earned in a year. Rice and wheat are cultivated on the remaining land. '*Khaaye bhar ka ho jaat*' i.e. they produce enough to eat. But Sushma's daughter-in-law remarks they have to buy as well because the crop gets mice infested.

Apart from own agriculture, Sushma owned a cow till two years previously. They sold a surplus of three litres of milk everyday at the rate of twelve rupees per litre to a sweet shop at the village junction. Sushma's son would go every morning to sell the milk. They sold the cow for seventeen thousand rupees. They have buffaloes which they sell to people who come to buy from other villages. They sell animals for milk and '*kasai*' (butcher).

Sushma has been doing agricultural wage labour since more than two decades. Sushma's daughter-in-law is involved in own agriculture and tends to livestock. She does not do wage labour. When he is in the village, Sushma's son helps out in own agricultural work. When he is unable to come to help out, he sends some money. Sushma uses this money to hire labour for own agriculture. In her own field, Sushma does spade work and even cut sugarcane. As wage labourer though, she does not cut sugarcane, only removes its leaves. No one would hire female labour to cut sugarcane. Male labour wage for sugarcane harvesting is only fifty rupees per day. Female labour is paid twenty-two rupees per day for removing the leaves, the *chutkas*, may pay thirty-five rupees. '*Yaha ki yahi reet hai*', this is the tradition here.

Till about a decade ago, Sushma provided unpaid labour services at the present *Pradhan*'s house. For example, scooping and Sushma was given a small share of

whatever was being scooped. A girl explains that now this is on the decline because people are able to produce enough in their own fields and because men migrate to earn. Men do not like women to be doing such work when they are migrating to earn. Sushma does not do unpaid labour for the pradhan any longer because she does not want to and because unlike *ruapani*, which happens once in six months, unpaid labour can be done anytime and she does not have time for it. Sushma continues to do wage labour for the pradhan. In fact, she does agricultural wage labour in this village only. When her children were young, she used to go to other villages as well for wage labour because she is a widow. But now her son does not like her going to other villages for wage labour because he earns and there is enough to eat. If Sushma does wage labour when her son is at home, he is annoyed. He asks her to work in own agriculture only. When her son is in the village, at times, Sushma goes for wage labour, but she hides it from him.

Sushma takes tobacco and other household goods on credit from a village general store. No interest is charged on it and money is paid when she has it.

There are three '*girhats*' (big landowners, major employers) in the village and one is these is the pradhan. In contract based work, the employer contacts one 'lead' labour and asks her to organise few labourers for the specified job. In daily wage work, the employers individually call on labourers house or they may send their servant to do so. Only *rupani* is done on contract work. *Sohini* and harvesting are done on daily wage basis. An employer from other villages is more likely to give contract based work, irrespective of the task to be done. '*Shuru se karte hain to jaankaari mein ki yeh majoora hain*', according to Sushma, employers know who to approach because the same people have been working for them over the years. An outside employer is likely to enquire from other employers regarding where labour can be recruited from. When employers call upon labourers, they tell the employer that labour will work for him, if he pays this much. Otherwise he can call labour from another village. Nevertheless, there is always a possibility some other labourers may be willing to work for less. If the employer cannot organise labourers from outside, he will come back to these labourers and offer them a slightly higher wage. Employers from outside are haggled for higher wages because labourers have to travel a greater distance for work. '*Un logon se vyvhaar nahi, note par kaam, phir voh apne ghar aur hum apne*

ghar', i.e. according to Sushma, local labourers and outside employers do not share close socio-economic ties, labourer works for money only, and once the work is completed, each goes its way.

In the past, Sushma has been asked to organise labour. Although, she herself may not go for wage labour, she organises labour and sends them for work. Hema explains that Sushma became a contractor, because she used to do wage labour from the beginning, she was clever, shrewd, she was always in the front, could organise labour for work and distribute wages among labourers (*'aise hi shuru se karte thi, aage thi, hushiyaar thi to logo ko bula kar le jaati thi'*). Sushma's neighbour is also a contractor. This neighbour's husband may take the contract, but the wife organises and takes labour for work. Sushma is motivated by the fact if she can organise some labourers to work with her, then she can also make some money. They recruit labour from among their neighbours, those they know, from households where labour is available and mostly from their own hamlet and few from Bhaisaha hamlet may also be included. Contractors and labourers are paid similar wages, otherwise labourers would blame her of cheating, for making more money (*'baimani lag jaayegi ki der kamate hain'*, says Sushma).

In case of local work, wages may be paid daily or at the completion of work. The employer may tell labour to collect the wages from his house after work has been completed or he may pay to one labourer and ask her to distribute among the rest or labourers may individually approach employers. If labourers need money before payment, they approach the employer for wages. In reality, however, wages are often delayed. Given that employers live nearby, labourers think that if not today, then they will get it tomorrow. At times, when they do not pay on time, labourers fight. They approach the contractor for wages and the contractor may have to pay. If the contractor does not have sufficient money on her self, she may go to the employer and fight for the payment of wages. Employers from other villages mostly pay on time, because of the distance. They give the wages to the contractor for distribution among labourers.

Wages for specific tasks are determined depending upon the physical labour involved. Sushma explains, *'mardana dhoop mein jyaada mehnat ka kaam karat...yeh log jaate,*

beeja ukhadte...phir jaate to ghanta bhar mein daal aate', i.e. i.e. men perform hard work under the sun; women go, take out the seeds and make bundles and then when they go to sow, they return in one hour. Demands for wage hike are modelled along lines of increasing wages of other jobs, increasing cost of hiring tractors for ploughing etc.

In daily wage work, the employer is present at the field for supervision and keeps hollering at labour to work fast. In contract based work, contractor does this. Labour tries to prolong work in both cases.

Exchange labour relations among labour are common in *sohini* and *rupani*. These are usually organised along the lines of hamlet. Here, if one refuses to work in return, there are fights between labourers (*'gaali-galoch hota'*).

The pradhan does not provide work under MGNREGA or gives work to his loyalists/favourites/supporters. He keeps all the money with himself. Any pradhan, irrespective of his caste, is self-interested.

Even if Mayawati provides benefits to labourers and lower-castes, the pradhan does not give anything. The pradhan made false entries in her son's job cards, collected the money which he kept with himself and then returned the job card. She does not fight with the pradhan because his tenure is almost over (*'ab unke utarne ka time ho gaya'*). Mayawati has not benefited lower-castes, but she has benefited labourers as wages have increased to hundred rupees and they get ration cards. Sushma gets widow pension. Sushma voted for Mayawati because everyone else voted for her and because she is of Sushma's *'biradri'*. Sushma had voted for a *badka* pradhan previously and she voted for the present *badka* pradhan thinking that he would help them because he is rich and does not need anything. But the present pradhan did not help. Hema once joked with her husband that she will stand for the pradhan's post next time, but her husband told her to live on what he earns.

Feelings of jealousy, animosity and competition are common among labourers and more so outside economic relations. For example, Sushma is organising a *shiv charcha* (religious gatherings where there is sermonising, music, food; these are

occasionally organised by different labouring households in the region; these are usually very well attended and go on till late nights and even early mornings) tonight at her house. She has arranged for someone to take a tractor-trolley and buy all the requirements from the market. All the purchasing will cost about fifteen hundred rupees and three women have contributed five hundred rupees each. Some neighbours are sarcastically mock that '*bada bazaar hota hai*' i.e. too much shopping is happening, they will see who all attend the function. Sushma is anxious about the turn out. There is no consensus or harmony in the *biradri*. According to Hema, everyone wants to be better than the rest, in their minds they cheat ('*sab aage rehna chahte, man mein bemaani*').

Hema never attends panchayat meetings. Sushma and her son go if it is related to their land. For example, once a relative had constructed a small room in their field while Hema was in hospital. Sushma and her son then approached the *pradhan* who promised them '*aabaadi*' land. But who knows whether they will get it?

Household decisions are taken in consultation with her son. Hema adds that her husband does not drink alcohol, he invested all the money in her health, otherwise she would not be living. Hema's sister's lives in the nearby block of Kasiya and her husband drinks a lot of alcohol and even sold his land and wife's jewellery to pay for alcohol.

[Parveen and Hema are talking together that when they go for *charcha*, they want wear nice glittery saris and put on some make-up. But Hema says that her husband does not like it. He tells her to wear plain saris when going out, otherwise she will catch the evil eye of *badkas* (indicating in the direction of the *pradhan*'s house)].

4.11. Birbati (Chamar)

Previously people cultivated *madua*, *bajra*, *tangadi* etc. Rice and wheat were not cultivated because of lack of 'water' (i.e. irrigation facilities). Even *badkas* did not cultivate these crops. Rice and wheat cultivation became popular with the introduction of canal more than twenty years ago. But the canal is now dry. The boring in Phool's field is not functioning and her crops dried last year. The boring was provided under a

government scheme. To irrigate her field, Birbati hires an 'engine' (pump-set) for hundred rupees per hour and a pipe for forty or sixty rupees per day.

Over the past twenty years, Birbati has worked as a helper of midwife. She describes herself as a '*daai*' and her tasks include '*pet masal de*', cleaning the baby etc. Birbati learned these from her mother-in-law who used to work as a helper of midwife. Birbati does this in her hamlet and 'Sapahi' i.e. the villages of Spahi Khas, Sapahi Khurd and Sapahi Bujurg. She describes this as her 'territory' and originally the same was serviced by her mother-in-law. Another woman covers the region of Bhaisaha (hamlet) and Sindori village. For every delivery, Birbati is awarded in the form of twenty-five kilos of rice or wheat and a token amount, say hundred rupees. Alternatively, she may be paid three hundred or three hundred and fifty rupees. The 'award' is less if the baby is a girl. When the parents are very happy, she may be gifted a nose ring or anklet. One time, at a baby boy's delivery, she was even given a goat.

With mechanisation, there has been a decline in the availability of wage labour. This has affected male labour particularly. There is only one man (reference to the male household head) and he has to go out and earn and feed a large family. But if the man migrates, saves and sends some money back, there is no '*pareshani*' (worry, problems, difficulties). This is used to buy things and eat. If he does not migrate, then there is '*pareshani*'.

Birbati's son has been migrating out since the past three or four years. '*...pet khaatir, ghar rahenge to kasht nahi hoga? Goan mein kha kaam lagat?.....*'. Birbati explains that her son migrated to provide for the family, to earn so they would not have to go hungry. If he were to stay at home, then would it not have caused '*kasht*' (hardship, suffering, misery). There is no work available in the village and one cannot stay in the village for '*kudni*' or '*katni*' which is available only seasonally. With migration, there has been some relief, '*sukh paate, aaraam hai*'. Her sons do not do agricultural wage labour in the village. Birbati strongly asserts that for fifty rupees her sons would not even go to *badkas* fields for toilet. In any case, they do not know how to do spade work or *katni* and why should they do such work, when their father is still earning?

Birbati is not aware of other developments in the labour market or who has benefited from these, because no one from her house is involved in these.

Her father-in-law was '*bevkuf, buddhu*' (simpleton, stupid). He did not even know where his field was or how much it was. Birbati describes him as cleaning '*pradhan's chutar.....jo anaaj milta tha, chaat leta rahe begari mein*'. It is implied that the father-in-law worked as a servant for the *pradhan* and was involved in very menial tasks such as cleaning after the *pradhan*. For his services, he was paid in kind. The father-in-law's brothers were educated and they transferred all land in their names without his knowledge. In latter years, Birbati's father-in-law worked as a labourer when the Patherva road was being constructed. With the money earned, he bought fourteen *katha* land. His two sons will inherit seven *katha* each. At present, they cultivate the land together. About, three and a half *katha* land has been mortgaged with a Dhobi to meet the expenses of her daughter's wedding. In another four *katha* sugarcane is cultivated and in the remaining seven *katha*, they cultivate rice and wheat. They can produce about one trolley of sugarcane which is sold to a mill. They earn about five thousand rupees from this. Birbati cannot cultivate the part of land mortgaged. This is cultivated by the creditor who retains the entire produce.

Birbati has been doing agricultural wage labour since the last twenty-thirty years. '*Kitna khet hai, khet ka koi bharosa? Pradhan nahi banata....hum dhanik hai to khud kaam karke chalana padega*'. Birbati strongly posits that her landholding is very small. She sarcastically asserts that the *pradhan* does not do anything for them because they are rich. That is why she has to work. Birbati provides labour services in the *Pradhan's* house as well and she is paid a token amount of ten or twenty rupees for services such as scooping. She may also be paid in kind. Few days ago, Birbati and another woman from the village scooped and cleaned seven sacks of mustard at this house. Rather than being given *masoor* which the poor could eat, they were given twenty rupees only.

About two year previously, Birbati borrowed one thousand rupees from Mahatam Singh at an interest of seven rupees on every hundred rupees per month. She has not been able to clear this debt and the interest is being accumulated. Birbati will pay when she can. She also takes household things on credit from a general store.

As an agricultural wage labourer, Birbati does *sohini* and *rupani*. *Babu log* pay only twenty-two rupees. In her own field, Birbati cuts sugarcane, as well as takes its leaves out. Only in cases where sugarcane is not harvested '*geda*', male labour is hired to cut sugarcane and female labour is hired to cut leaves of sugarcane. For this, male labour is paid fifty rupees per day and female labour is paid twenty-two rupees per day. Female labour is not hired to cut sugarcane because employers say that they will not be able to do the same amount of work as men do. Her husband does spade work on a contract basis. This type of work pays more because it is more strenuous and is done on a contract basis. Wages are paid on the basis of per *katha*.

Employers from outside the village, hire labour on a contract basis, whether for *sohini* or *rupani*. In the case of *sohini*, thirty rupees are charged per *katha*. Employers from the village are more likely to recruit labour on a daily wage basis. They will be at a loss if they recruit labour on a contract basis because labour would ask for more money. These landowners are not satisfied unless they personally call upon labourers because they believe that only then will labour come to work. In daily wage based work, employers have to pay less. Labour does not do *badkas* work properly. Employers from the village go door to door to recruit labour. Employers from outside the village contact Birbati's husband who they may meet in public places like the market. Her husband was a *band master* i.e. a member of a wedding music band. '*Palki uthate the*'. They tell Birbati's husband details of the task to be done. He then quotes an amount. The actual recruitment and organising of labour is done by Birbati. He might go along with women. But, for example, he cannot sit and sow rice, so he stands at one place and hand scatters seeds. He may collect and distribute wages among labourers. He himself is paid the same amount as other labourers in the group.

Employers from other villages, pay wages on time and may even pay some advance. This advance serves as security in case he does not pay for next couple of days or so, for what would labour eat otherwise? Labourers quote and get higher wages from outside employers. This is because they do share social ties and labourers do not approach them for food or money in times of need. This is not the case with employers from own hamlet and village. The contractor and labourers are paid the same wages. Delayed wage payment is common in the case of own village employers.

Badkas pay less wages than *chutka* and this is why their work is not done properly. '*Agar jyada majdooori dete to man se karte*', i.e. labour would have worked properly if they paid higher wages. *Chutkas* pay more because they think that labourers work diligently and hard and that is why their work is done properly. Birbati categorically states that she does more agricultural wage labour outside the village and very less wage labour for the *pradhan*.

Local employers are present on field for supervision in daily wage work. They keep egging on labour to hurry. If a labourer even tried standing up, the employer shouts to don't stand and keep working. If the employers are not present on site, then labourers work slowly and procrastinate. If it is very sunny, they keep behind grass in the shade. Labourers are not even given water to drink. In contrast, when labourers are working outside the village, they are given water, sweets and are paid in the evening. No one stays at the field hollering at labour. Here labourers work properly.

Exchange labour relations are common among labourers. Primarily *katni* and *sohini* are done on an exchange basis. Men may do *kudni* on an exchange basis. Exchange relations are organised among neighbours and with familiar people, not with people from outside the village. Exchange labour relations are fraught with petty fights among labourers. When one refuses to work in the field of another in return, a verbal duelling involving curse and abuse words (*gaali-galoch*) ensues between the two parties. The latter blames the former of behaving like a '*zamindar*' i.e. landlord.

For her daughter's wedding, the groom's side has asked for seventeen thousand rupees, a cycle, a gold coin, utensils etc.

Household decisions regarding agriculture or weddings are taken by Birbati and not her husband.

It appears that recently Birbati has joined a micro-credit or SHG in the block of Faazilnagar. She has taken a loan of eight thousand rupees. Birbati has to pay two hundred rupees per week to the organisation. Birbati herself does not do any formalities. Someone holds and directs her hand so that she can sign. Birbati and one

other woman are the only two people who have joined such an organisation. But there are many women from other villages who do so. Credit is taken for purposes of building a house, food etc. According to Birbati, having seen others do it (*dekha-dekhi mein*), many more will now take credit.

In Birbati's *biradri* there is '*rai*' (consensus, harmony) and '*ladai*' (fight) on petty issues like fights among children.

Villagers call Mayawati '*randi*' (prostitute) who has two daughters and is not married.

Mayawati gives everything to the poor but the middlemen do not give it. She has decreased prices and increased wages. However, because of wage hike, people have increased rates.